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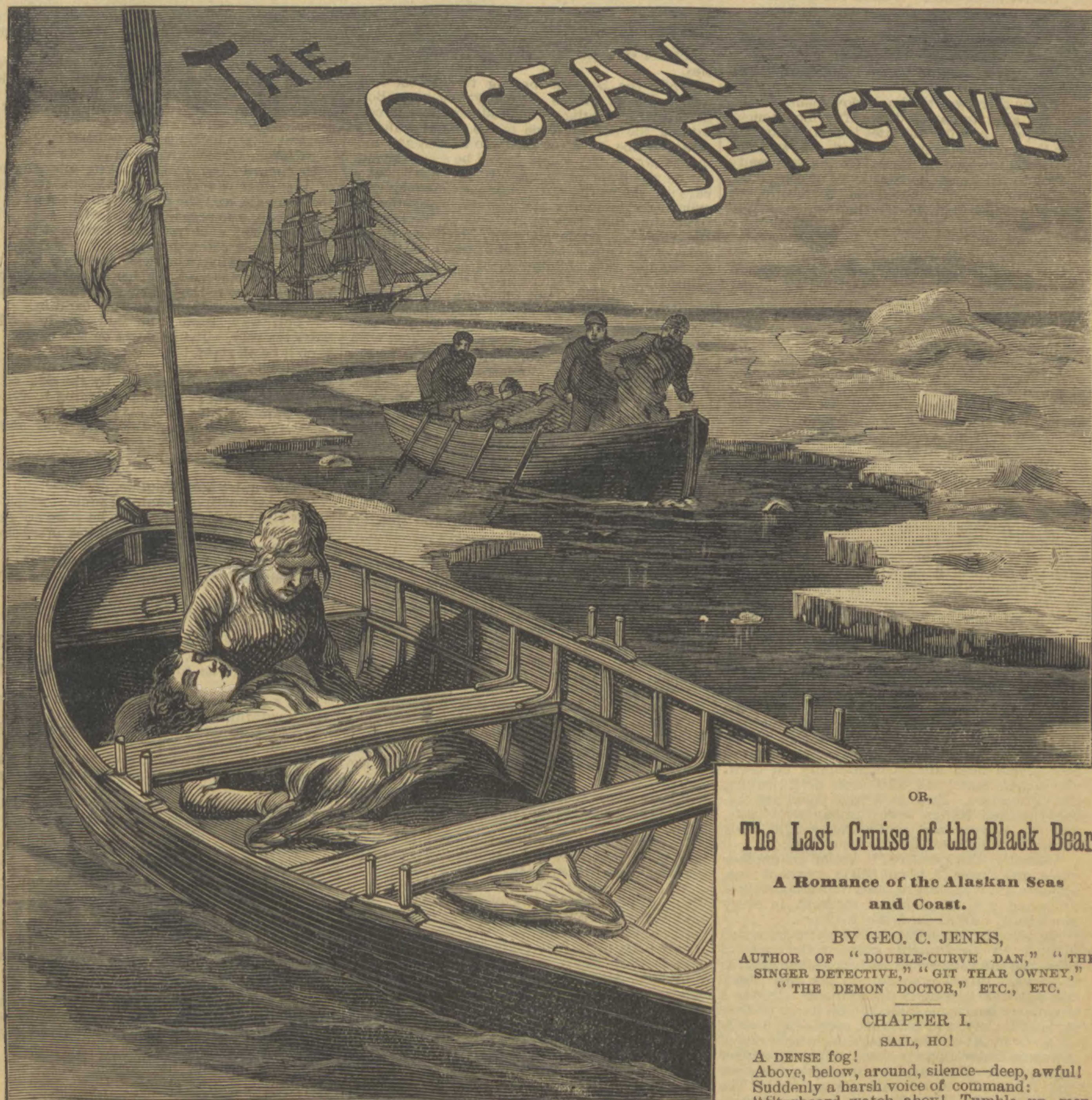
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"TWO WOMEN!" MUTTERED BOB. AS HE LOOKED FIXEDLY AT THE OCCUPANTS
OF THE YAWL.

OR,
The Last Cruise of the Black Bear

A Romance of the Alaskan Seas
and Coast.

BY GEO. C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "DOUBLE-CURVE DAN," "THE
SINGER DETECTIVE," "GIT THAR OWNEY,"
"THE DEMON DOCTOR," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SAIL, HO!

A DENSE fog!
Above, below, around, silence—deep, awful!
Suddenly a harsh voice of command:
"Starboard watch ahoy! Tumble up, men!
Be lively!"
As if the elements had taken cognizance of

the order, and had been startled out of their usual impassiveness, the fog lifted like a huge brown curtain, and allowed a few of the sun's rays to stream redly down upon what, in spite of its dreariness, was a beautiful scene.

A whaling bark in the center of an ice-floe.

As far as the eye could reach, from the deck of the vessel, the blue-white of snow-covered ice. An almost solid pack that had floated down from the Arctic, toward the Behring Sea, and had caught in its embrace the good ship *Americus*, of New Bedford, Massachusetts, hunting whales off the coast of Alaska.

"Starboard watch ahoy!" repeated the harsh voice, and a figure wrapped in a heavy deerskin overcoat, with a sealskin cap on its head, revealing a weather-beaten, but pleasant face beneath it, stood at the fore-castle and waited for the order to be obeyed.

"The lubbers must have more ballast in their heels than usual," he grumbled. "What's the time, Bob?"

A bright young fellow, of perhaps twenty years of age, who was walking briskly along the deck, with his fur cap in his hand, as if disdaining to acknowledge the chilliness of the atmosphere, answered carelessly:

"Nearly eight bells. What's the trouble?"

But ere the other could answer, there was a general bustle at his feet, and, one after the other, some forty able-bodied seamen came out of the fore-castle, ready for orders.

"Man my boat, and stand by to launch her over the ice."

At once there was the busy movement of men who are glad to have a duty after monotonous idleness, and in a few minutes the yawl hanging over the gunwale on the starboard side well forward, was loosened in its davits and was ready to drop to the ice at the next word of command.

"Lookout ahoy!" shouted the boatswain, for that was the rank of the weather-beaten man in authority.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Whereaway do you make her now?"

"Two points on the starboard bow about half a mile away."

"What do you make her?"

"A ship's yawl, with two people aboard, drifting sou'west. They have rigged up an oar with a handkerchief or something."

The man above, who was answering the eager inquiries, was in what is known as the crow's-nest, a small, boxed-in structure of canvas in the maintop, from whence he could see for miles in every direction, without being exposed to the biting blasts of an Arctic temperature. The ordinary situation of a lookout at the mast-head would not be bearable in northern latitudes, and the crow's-nest is always provided for the man upon whose sharp vision the safety of the vessel mainly depends.

"Bob, you'd better call the skipper. I don't care about chasing after these people on my own say-so," observed the boatswain to the boy, after a moment's thought.

"All right, Silas. But, I don't know whether he will thank me for waking him. He's about played out, and he was as cross as Old Nick when he turned in."

"Wal, mebbe you'd better call Mr. Stokes, then I'm gol-blamed if I want to command the *'Merikus*, altogether, jist now."

To account for the boatswain being at the head of affairs, it must be stated that the *Americus* had had a dangerous passage through the ice for the last two days, during which Captain Wrench, and his first mate, Wilfred Stokes, had been almost continually on deck. The second mate had died soon after leaving San Francisco. Now that the bark had become packed things were comparatively safe, and the skipper and mates had sought their bunks, leaving Silas Hawkins in charge.

"What's the question?" broke in another voice, and a man of about thirty years of age, almost a giant in stature, with well-proportioned limbs and a world of latent strength in every movement, walked carelessly forward.

His piercing black eyes belied his unconcerned manner, for they rapidly scanned the faces of Silas and the young man he had called Bob, as if to make sure that nothing to his own disadvantage was passing in their minds. He was a singularly handsome man, of the dark, Satanic style of beauty, and his dress, consisting mainly of an overcoat of black bearskin, with a cap of the same material, gave him a still more somber appearance. He was known among his crew and those of other whaling vessels as "The Black Bear." His sobriquet was never mentioned in his hearing, however.

Clarence Wrench was a man of quick temper and iron will, and when he was displeased a

blow that was likely to mean death to the recipient was delivered without hesitation or compunction.

"Sail on the starboard bow!" announced Hawkins, briefly.

"Boat in distress," added Bob.

Captain Wrench raised his telescope, that had been protruding from his pocket, and looked in the direction of the black spot that could be seen across the field of ice floating in blue water.

"Lower away!" he commanded. "I'll go myself. Silas, call Mr. Stokes."

The boatswain, accustomed to prompt obedience, went aft, and in a few minutes returned with the first mate, who, at a word from the captain, assumed command of the *Americus*, while Silas followed the captain over the side into the boat. Bob, though not invited, went too.

The yawl lay on the ice, but the crew had no difficulty in sliding it along for a few hundred feet to a huge crack in the pack, which appeared to afford an outlet to the clear sea whereon the strange yawl rocked and drifted toward the immense ice-floe.

The crack was perhaps one hundred feet wide, so that the eight oars of the crew were not impeded, and, with Captain Wrench steering, and Silas standing in the bow, the yawl cut through the water a great deal faster than a stranger would have thought possible, considering its heavy build. Whaling-boats are not shaped so much for speed as for thorough sea-going qualities.

While the boat is moving toward the castaways, let us glance at the young man, Bob. Sitting in a negligent attitude on the tub containing the coil of rope to the end of which is attached the harpoon ready to be cast at a moment's notice, if a whale should be seen, the lad, for he was little more, seemed to be without a care in the world. His familiar manner with everybody, including the captain, was sufficient indication that he was not one of the crew of the *Americus*, while his ready obedience to the rules of the ship showed that he was not disposed to try and take advantage of his independent position.

Robert Burleigh had suddenly appeared in New Bedford, shortly before the *Americus* set sail on her three-years' whaling cruise, and seeking Captain Wrench, had been closeted with him in the latter's cabin for an hour. At the end of that time he was introduced to Wilfred Stokes and the second mate as a young gentleman from Boston, who was going with them as a passenger, with the understanding that he would rough it with the rest, and would, if occasion arose, work or fight for the general good, under the orders of the ship's officers.

It did not take Captain Wrench long to discover that Bob—as he insisted upon being called by everybody, from the skipper to the cook's boy—was a Harvard College man, and that his father was one of the wealthiest lawyers in Boston.

With this introduction, the reader will be left to improve the acquaintance of Bob Burleigh, as this narrative progresses.

"Well?" observed the captain, interrogatively, as the boat, running out of the canal, gave Silas a clear view of the strange yawl.

"Thunder an' snakes! I b'lieve it's two women. Yes, I swan. So it be!"

"Women?"

"Yes, ez sure ez my name is Hawkins."

Captain Wrench stood up, with his telescope in his hand; but he did not need its assistance to convince him that the boatswain had spoken the truth. There were, in truth, two women in the drift.

"Bear away, men!" he shouted, and the eight oars bent beneath the vigorous pulling of the crew.

Now they were very near the yawl, and were convinced that they had not come any too soon for the good of those on board.

"Two women!" muttered Bob, as he looked fixedly at the occupants of the yawl. "Yes, and refugees from that cursed country on our left, or I'm mistaken."

"Steady, all! Pull port! Back water, starboard! So! Easy!"

As the captain thus spoke, his boat ground against the gunwale of the stranger, and Silas Hawkins stepped on board of her.

Leaning against the oar that had been lashed upright to one of the seats in the bow of the yawl, with a fluttering rag at the top, was an elderly woman, with gray hair framing her wan face, which showed in every lineament the unmistakable traces of high breeding. In spite of the wretched rags that were huddled around her, one could see at a glance that she was a lady.

Bob, who had been close behind the boatswain, put out his hand to her to raise her from her cramped position in the bottom of the boat, but she waved her hand impatiently, and motioned to him to look to her companion.

Lying with her head in the elder woman's lap, partly covered by an old sealskin wrap, was another, who, Bob saw, as he pushed back the wealth of brown hair that shrouded the face, was a young girl of singular beauty.

At first he thought she was unconscious, but she moved slightly as he touched her, and murmuring "Mother!" looked into his face.

"My child! My Marie!" said the other, as she bent over the girl, and kissed her passionately. "We are saved—saved!"

"Wal, captain, what'll we do? Tow her back ter the *'Merikus*, or jist ship them two women on our own boat, and cut the other adrift?" bawled Silas.

He always addressed the captain as if they were the length of the ship apart, in a gale, even when close to him.

"Bring the people on board, and then make the yawl fast to us. We don't want to lose a good boat because we are too lazy to take it."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Silas.

Bob had by this time raised the girl to her feet, and was carefully leading her toward the stern, where she could step into the other boat in the stern-sheets, Clarence Wrench glancing at him with a half-contemptuous smile.

As the girl, in stepping over the gunwale, pushed back her hair and allowed the captain to see her face, his black eyes flashed with excitement, and as he turned his back upon her, he muttered below his breath:

"Curse it! It seems impossible!"

"Clarence!" said a voice in his ear.

He turned sharply, and looked into the eyes of the elder woman, who, with one foot upon the gunwale, and the other upon the seat of the stroke oar, was regarding him with a horrified stare, in which hatred and contempt were as prominent as astonishment.

Silas Hawkins, who was assisting her, was too much concerned for her safety in stepping from one boat to the other, to notice the little by-play between herself and the captain.

"This way, mum," he said, busily. "This 'ere's the way. Jist sit down on this canvas an' yeou'll be all right."

Still with her eye fixed on the captain, she suffered herself to be seated by the side of her daughter, whom Bob was persuading to drink a little Jamaica rum from his pocket-flask.

"Clarence!" she repeated, just loud enough for the captain to hear.

A scowl clouded his brow as he bent down and whispered:

"Keep quiet now, Pauline, or I'll—"

"What?" with a disdainful smile.

His right hand, upon which he wore no glove, and which, white and soft, was yet cruel in its every line, crept to the inside of his coat, and drew forth a dirk-knife, held so tightly that red spots showed themselves between the white knuckles.

"This!" he hissed.

"Kill me?"

"Yes, curse you! If I had only known who it was on that boat, I'd—"

"Have left us to freeze or starve to death, I suppose?"

The woman was as quiet and calm now as he was wrathful.

"Yes, I would! I'd have let you rot! You, and your miserable brat!"

The words came low, and he looked like a cobra just before it springs upon its defenseless victim.

"Clarence Wrench, you are a—"

"Hush!" He saw that Bob Burleigh was looking.

"I will not hush."

He put his hand over her mouth, but she tore it away desperately, and, just as Bob half-arose from his knees in attendance upon Marie, to interfere in what he yet could not understand, she spoke the word in an awful screech, "*Murderer!*" and fell back unconscious.

"Eh?" asked Hawkins, in bewilderment, as Bob raised her from the bottom of the boat.

"Give way!" shouted Clarence Wrench, and the crew bent to their oars and rowed toward the canal, which had now extended to the very cutwater of the *Americus*, giving her a clear passage to the open sea.

CHAPTER II.

PIETRO'S HEAVY FIST.

THE Black Bear seemed well suited to his name as he sat moodily in the stern-sheets and, with the tiller in his hand, steered mechanically, with

his brows bent, and his fiery eyes never removed from the face of Pauline Novritch.

She, after uttering the one terrible word, had been easily restored by Bob Burleigh, who apparently had not attached any significance to the utterance, but had attributed all the excitement to sheer exhaustion and the flighty condition of mind that it naturally engendered.

The eight oarsmen had enough to do in pulling the boat, and did not trouble themselves about anything else. Besides, they knew Captain Wrench too well to show any interest in matters outside the line of their duty.

Silas stood in the bow, looking forward, and from force of habit held his long harpoon in his horny fist, as if he expected to see a whale at any moment.

The two women sat in each other's embrace—the girl still in a half-bewildered state, and her mother with her glance defiantly returning that of Clarence Wrench.

Thus they reached the *Americus*, the captain raising his eyes for a moment to admire her trim appearance. Everything about her was taut and neat, her sails clewed up to the yards, her anchors triced up to the hawse-holes, and everything that could be seen from the deck of the boat in its place. It was an *ensemble* such as any seaman could but admire.

As soon as the boat touched the hull of the ship, Captain Wrench seized a rope, and, hauling himself up hand-over-hand, sprang into the chains and thence to the deck.

One swift glance around, and then he uttered a low whistle, of peculiar intonation.

The sound had hardly left his lips when a being that one could hardly declare was human, stepped into view. A creature with a large head and a large, flabby face, with only one eye—the right having been lost by being struck with a splinter from a shivered mast in a gale some three years before. He was not more than four feet high, though, if his bowed legs had been straight, he might have been several inches taller. He had long, black, curly hair, that straggled down from beneath his fur cap; and around his deerskin coat, that reached only half-way to his knees, he wore a broad sash that had in the long ago been crimson. Greasy buckskin leggings and moccasins completed his attire. When his features were in repose, he looked like a harmless fool; when excited he was devilish enough to be a fitting aide-de-camp to the remorseless Clarence Wrench.

"Oh, you're there, are you, Pietro?"

The dwarf nodded. He never spoke when a gesture would do instead.

"Come to my cabin as soon as these people are aboard. I have work for you."

"Deviltry, I suppose."

The captain raised his arm threateningly, but the other never moved. He only shot a contemptuous glance from his one eye.

"Never mind what it is. Get to the cabin now."

Pietro looked over the side of the vessel to where Silas Hawkins was securing the rope ladder below, so that the two ladies could be helped up to the deck of the vessel. A grin of intelligence overspread the flabby face, and with a wink of his eye that was perfectly impish, he shuffled aft and made his way down the companionway to the captain's cabin.

"So! so!" he muttered. "Pauline, eh? Where did he pick her up? Never expected to see her again."

"Steady, neow!" exclaimed Silas, as he directed the young girl to put her foot on the rather treacherous rope ladder, and held her until she had climbed high enough for Bob, who had gone up first, to give her his hand and raise her to the ship's deck.

As already stated, the ice-pack had split, leaving clear water all around the *Americus*. Fortunately, being sheltered by the ice, it was perfectly smooth, and the boats were almost as still as if they had been lying on the floe.

Clarence Wrench stood at the head of the ladder, and extended his hand to Marie. She allowed his fingers to touch hers and then drew them quickly back with a little shudder.

The action was entirely involuntary, and she could not have told why his soft finger-tips sent such a thrill of terror through her frame. She only knew that such was the fact, and that the dark-eyed man shot a glance at her which was full of covert menace.

All this had passed so quickly that only the sharp eyes of Bob Burleigh had detected it. He did not allow any one to see that he had observed anything, but he made a mental note of every gesture, and he determined in his own mind that Pauline and Marie Novritch were

both threatened with worse peril than that from which they had been rescued in their open boat.

"Take them to my own cabin, Bob," said Captain Wrench as Pauline reached the deck, and passing him without a look, put her arm around her daughter. "It is theirs as long as they remain aboard the *Americus*."

"Thank you," said Marie; but her mother, without a word, declined Bob's proffered arm, and walked steadily, notwithstanding her evident weakness, to the after companionway, which she descended to the captain's cabin.

Clarence Wrench marched up and down the deck in deep thought, for half an hour after the ladies had gone down to the cabin.

"Well, captain, I guess they are all right now. They are sitting on the sofa in your snugery, as much at home as if they commanded the *Americus*, and had done so for two or three years."

It was Bob Burleigh who spoke, and he touched the captain familiarly on the shoulder as he did so.

The Black Bear stopped in his walk, and turning sharply around, looked the young man full in the face.

"Do you know who they are?" he asked.

"Certainly. You don't suppose I would bear them company for half an hour without getting their pedigree, do you—especially when Madame Novritch is so willing to talk?"

"Well?"

"She is an American woman—a New Yorker. She met Ivan Novritch seventeen years ago in Washington, when he was a member of the Russian embassy there."

"Well?"

"Ivan died lately. Mrs. Novritch and her daughter were carried out to sea from the Russian coast, and had about given themselves up for lost when we picked her up."

"I wish we had never seen her," muttered the captain, savagely.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I did not speak."

"Oh!"

Bob spoke this word with a peculiar intonation of intelligence that did not escape the Black Bear, but the latter did not make any remark, save to inquire, carelessly:

"Did Mrs. Novritch condescend to explain how she came to be in an open boat at all in the Arctic Ocean?"

"She did," answered the young man, looking full into the captain's eyes, as if challenging him to ask something more.

Clarence Wrench understood the challenge, but it did not suit his purpose to accept it. He strolled aft, with his hands in the pockets of his bearskin overcoat, and went down the companionway, Bob Burleigh looking after him with a smile curling his lip, and a strange light shining in his keen blue eyes.

A tap at the cabin door and "Come in" in a clear voice from within.

Captain Wrench removed his cap and bowed with ceremonious politeness as he entered the cabin and faced Pauline Novritch and her daughter.

Pietro was laying the cloth for dinner, and the two ladies faced each other on lockers on either side of the table. A sofa near the door was unoccupied, and upon this Clarence Wrench seated himself.

"I have something to say to you, Pauline," he commenced abruptly, addressing himself to the elder lady, without taking any notice of Marie or Pietro.

"Be brief then, if you please. Accident has made me indebted to you for my life. For my daughter's sake I must thank you. Were it not for her I would rather have remained in the boat to sink into the dreamless sleep that is ever ready to welcome weary wanderers in this terrible region. My life is spent."

As Mme. Novritch thus spoke, she shook her head sadly. But recovering herself with an effort, she looked inquiringly at the captain and waited for him to speak.

"How did you come here?" he asked.

"Clarence Wrench, it should hardly be necessary for you to ask that."

"Nevertheless, I do ask it."

Pietro had finished his preparations for the meal, and now stood calmly by the table listening to the conversation.

"Pietro," growled the Black Bear.

"Yes."

"Get out."

Though the words were spoken sharply, there was a quick turn of the captain's eye that the dwarf saw and understood. He opened a door at the end of the cabin that was concealed by a heavy curtain of dark velvet, and banged it.

"Now he has gone, Pauline, tell me how you come to be floating about Behring's Straits in a small boat in such an uncomfortable condition?"

"Marie," said Pauline suddenly, ignoring Clarence Wrench's question.

"Yes, mother."

"This man is your father's murderer!"

"Mother!"

The young girl clasped her hands in horror as she looked into the dark face of the captain, whose clinched fist, resting upon the table, twitched and worked nervously.

"You talk like a—"

He was going to say "fool," but something in the eye of Marie warned him that it would be unwise to do so, so he substituted the words "very prejudiced person."

"Listen, Marie," continued her mother. "Ivan Novritch, your father, was an honored, rich man in Washington, where you were born, seventeen years ago. You know where he is now."

"Alas! Yes! He lies in an exile's grave in Siberia."

"Dead, is he?" asked Clarence Wrench eagerly.

"Yes."

A faint chuckle sounded behind the curtain at the end of the cabin, but no one noticed it. Yet, if the curtain had been hastily pulled aside, Pietro, the dwarf, would have been revealed, standing there listening to every word. His opening and shutting of the door was only a ruse.

"Well, if he is dead, is it any fault of mine?" asked Wrench, with a sneer.

"Is it any fault of yours?" repeated Pauline, sorrowfully. "Who caused him to be recalled to St. Petersburg, and from thence, after the mockery of a trial, sent to Siberia, where he wore out his life in expiating offenses he never committed? Answer me that."

"I had nothing to do with it. I was never in Russia any further than along the coast here."

"You lie!"

The swarthy features of the Black Bear were distorted with passion as these two words were flung at him vehemently. He sprang up from the sofa, and losing all control of himself, seized Pauline Novritch by the throat and bore her backward with deadly intention.

Marie shrieked, but, before the sound had more than half escaped her lips, a something like a big ball of deerskin, curly hair and black fur, dashed from behind the curtain and struck Captain Wrench a tremendous blow in the face.

The Black Bear rolled over upon the sofa as if shot, and Pauline lay back, gasping and trembling, but alive.

Marie gave her mother a glass of water, and with arms around her neck tried to calm her.

The Black Bear slowly recovered himself and looked around the cabin, half-dazed, while Pietro, who, it is needless to say, was the individual who had saved Mme. Novritch from strangulation, thrust his immense hands into the pockets of his deerskin coat and whistled unconcernedly.

"You scoundrel!" muttered the captain, as soon as he realized where he was and what had happened.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the dwarf, coolly. "But you had better not use such strong words while you have that lump on your jaw. You'll make it sore."

There was indeed a tremendous swelling at the side of the captain's chin, where the dwarf's brawny fist had descended with almost the force of a battering-ram.

Without another word, Pietro turned and disappeared behind the curtain.

"You shall see me again, soon," said the Black Bear to Pauline, as he followed the dwarf.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK BEAR SCENTS DANGER.

CAPTAIN WRENCH appeared on deck five minutes after the scene described in the foregoing chapter, as cool and stern as if nothing had occurred to disturb his equanimity. The only indication of what had passed in the cabin was a swelling, red and angry, on his chin, but men on shipboard, where accidental knocks and bruises are of common occurrence think, but little of them when they do not incapacitate a man for duty.

"Sail on the port bow!" reported Wilfred Stokes, as Captain Wrench walked forward.

"Ah! What is she?"

"Looks like a Russian cruiser."

"Steam?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Well, we don't want to meet her."

Stand away to the northwest and give her a wide berth."

"Sensible for once," growled a voice, at the captain's elbow, as Pietro swaggered past him, and, with a telescope nearly as long as himself, tried to make out the stranger.

She was some distance away, and but little was to be seen of her save her topmasts and a very thin stream of bluish-white smoke.

The *Americus* had got under way while the captain had been below, and was now careering gallantly toward the open Arctic in obedience to the suggestion of Silas Hawkins, who had a "gift," as he called it, for telling where the next whale was to be found. His "gift" had convinced him that they would meet a big "bow-head" or "right whale" off the Alaskan coast as soon as they had got out of the Straits.

The Black Bear and his first mate, each with telescopes to their eyes, stood watching the stranger, as the *Americus* swerved still more to the northeast, as the helmsman put the wheel down hard to starboard, at Stokes's orders.

"She's after us, curse her!" muttered Wrench, as he saw that the steamer had altered her course, and was evidently determined to run across the bows of the *Americus*.

"Going to run away from her?" asked Pietro, wagging his big head, sarcastically, and screwing up his one eye in his own impish fashion.

"Fool!" responded Wrench.

"Stand by," he added, a moment later. "She is after us. We don't want to be dodging her. At least we must not let them see that we are. Mr. Stokes, take in a reef on the main and mizzen topsails, and put the helm a couple of points to port. We will meet her gracefully."

The maneuvers were quickly executed, and the *Americus* and the steamer were before long within hailing distance.

The steamer flew the Russian colors at her peak, while the Stars and Stripes floated at the main-gaff of the *Americus*.

"What ship is that?" shouted an officer in the uniform of the Russian Navy, from the quarter-deck through a speaking-trumpet.

"The *Americus* of New Bedford, Massachusetts, United States of America, hunting whales," answered Clarence Wrench, adding softly to himself: "And I'd like to meet you, man to man, with just a knife each. I'd teach you to ask impudent questions."

"Look out!" suddenly exclaimed Pietro.

"Why, what yer doin'?" added Silas Hawkins.

Pauline Novritch was standing behind the captain, wildly waving her handkerchief to the captain of the Russian steamer.

The Black Bear turned quickly, and snatching the handkerchief from her hand, put his heel behind her, and, with a dexterous twist, taking her entirely off her guard, threw her violently to the deck.

"Mother!" shrieked Marie, who, unnoticed by Wrench, had also been behind him.

"Make her keep quiet, or, by Heaven, I'll kill her! Remember, that on board of the *Americus*, my word is law."

"The law of justice is higher than yours, and it will punish you yet, Clarence Wrench," cried Pauline, whom her daughter was assisting to her feet.

"Oh, mother, cannot we get away from here? Why did we not stay in our own boat? We should have reached shore very likely, and even if we had not, it would have been better to die than to get into the power of such a man as this."

Thus speaking, Marie rested her head on her mother's shoulder and wept from sheer fright and exhaustion.

"Say, Cap, the Roosians are coming," said Pietro, as he sat curled up on the gunwale, and screwed up his one eye to look through his long telescope.

"What?"

It was true. A boat had indeed been launched from the steamer, and they could see the flash of the four oars, as the sailors bent to their work, and pulled rapidly over the smooth water.

"Pietro."

There was a peculiar ring in the tone of the Black Bear that the dwarf knew meant trouble, with desperate projects to meet and overcome it.

"Well, Cap," answered Pietro, springing from his perch like a monkey, and landing, telescope and all, under the other's very nose.

Wrench stooped and whispered.

The dwarf nodded intelligently and glanced at the two women, who still remained crouched upon the deck, waiting for developments.

The party were just abaft the mainmast, Silas Hawkins, the first mate and the sailors of the watch on deck, with the exception of the man at

the wheel, being all forward, and curiously watching the rapidly approaching boat from the Russian steamer.

"At once," added the captain, aloud.

Pietro seized Marie by the wrist, and without any apparent effort raised her to her feet.

Her mother flew at him like a tigress.

"Take your hands off my child," she shrieked.

The dwarf grinned.

Silas Hawkins and Wilfred Stokes both heard the cry of Pauline, and involuntarily moved as if to come toward her.

The Black Bear waved his hand, and, so thorough was the discipline he maintained aboard the *Americus*, that both the men turned away and resumed their observation of the approaching boat without taking any more notice of the scene that was being enacted on the deck of their own vessel. Captain Wrench had managed to intimate by the simple motion of his hand that Pauline and Marie Novritch were hysterical from the excitement and privation they had undergone, and that he was doing the best he could for them under the circumstances.

Meanwhile Pietro had thrown one arm around each of the women, and lifting them from their feet, took them down the companion-ladder and into the captain's cabin, where the table was still spread with the meal that had been prepared for them.

"Will you stay here and eat something?" asked Pietro, as he still held them.

"No," answered Pauline, vehemently. She had been so choked with passion that she had been unable to utter another word after her first cry when the dwarf grasped Marie's wrist.

"Very well; then I must obey the captain's orders."

Without further parley, he lifted them again, and pushing aside the curtain that concealed the door, opened the latter, and took them into a place that, to their unaccustomed eyes, seemed to be pitch-dark.

The dwarf walked on unhesitatingly for a few steps. Then he stopped and put them down, still holding their arms in a vise-like clutch.

"Where are you going to put us?" asked Pauline, recovering her speech with an effort.

"Into the captain's boudoir," chuckled the dwarf, "where you will be strictly private and out of the wind."

As he spoke there was a rattling and creaking and a gust of warm, fetid atmosphere, redolent of oil and stale fish struck Pauline Novritch. As for Marie, she had fallen in a faint.

Pauline's eyes were now partly used to the gloom, and she saw with horror that the dwarf had opened a large trap-door, revealing an opening through which she could distinguish a ladder leading apparently into the depths of the hold.

"Come on," commanded Pietro, in a business-like way.

He stooped and raised Marie. As he did so her mother struck him on the head with her clinched fist with all her force. The dwarf chuckled.

"You'll hurt your knuckles if you try that," he remarked quietly, as, with the young girl in his arms, he went rapidly down the ladder into the noisome hole at her feet.

"Come back!" she shrieked. "My child! My child! Oh, Ivan, were you here now, how your strong arm would lay low this wretch!"

The only answer to her despairing cry was a demoniacal peal of laughter from the yawning pit into which the dwarf had sunk out of sight with Marie.

For one wild moment Pauline tried to look around her and find some way of escape. Then, as Pietro had coolly calculated would be the case, her mother love overcame every other consideration, and she went as quickly as she could down the ladder to rejoin her child, regardless of all else.

The ladder was greasy and steep, and, incumbered as she was by her skirts, she climbed down it with difficulty. How long the ladder was or where she would find herself when she reached the bottom she had no idea.

Suddenly an arm encircled her and she was lifted from the ladder and seated on a barrel lying on its side.

"There you are, Madame Novritch, and here is your girl," croaked the dwarf, as he took Pauline's hand and guided it to the face of Marie, who was lying on a pile of old canvas and rope that had been stored here to be sold for junk when the *Americus* should reach port.

"You have killed my child!" moaned Pauline as she took the head of Marie in her lap and felt her cold, lifeless face.

"Not a bit of it," answered the dwarf.

He was lighting a small oil lamp which, with a great deal of smoke and bad odor, yet enabled

them to see something of their surroundings. He put the lamp down on the head of a convenient barrel, and drawing from his pocket a small flask of brandy, put it to the lips of the girl. She moved slightly, and soon, under the influence of the strong spirit, revived sufficiently to cling around her mother's neck, and burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

Pietro nodded as if satisfied, and running up the ladder, looked down and said: "I'll bring you some water and food. You need not trouble yourself to make any noise. No one could hear you, and it would only waste your breath."

With another chuckle he stepped out of the hole and shut down the trap with a bang.

Clasping her daughter to her breast, Pauline Novritch tried to understand where they were. She knew enough about the internal arrangements of ships to be sure that they were not in the hold proper, but on a lower deck below the main deck, where stores required on the voyage were stowed in such a manner that they could be taken out without much difficulty.

The oil lamp was a common tin affair, without a glass chimney, though the flame was surrounded by a small wire cage for safety. With the exception of the light given by the lamp the place was quite dark. There were port-holes, but the head-lights were up, and the water, which reached so near to them as to make the port-holes useless save in harbor, where there was no rough water at all, lapped against the dead-lights and sang a mournful lullaby to the half-unconscious girl resting in the arms of her mother.

Scarcely had Pauline made up her mind to explore their present quarters when the trap opened again, and Pietro, with a tray containing the meal that had been prepared for them in the captain's cabin, and with a large tin bucket of water, hanging to his fingers, came down the ladder, his mis-shapen limbs and awkward body looking more grotesque than ever as, monkey-like, he lowered himself to the bottom.

"Eat and drink," he growled, briefly, and before Pauline could shape into words her desire to know what was to be the fate of Marie and herself, he had run up the ladder and left them again in gloom and silence.

CHAPTER IV.

BOB BURLEIGH ON THE TRAIL.

WHILE Pietro was disposing of Pauline Novritch and her daughter on the lower deck, Clarence Wrench was anxiously watching the movements of the Russian steamer and her boat.

He saw that, while the latter was being rowed swiftly toward the *Americus*, the steamer had been gently veered around, and was coming head on toward the whaler.

"Mr. Stokes?" called the captain.

"Sir."

"She seems to be trying to surround us, eh?" observed Wrench, with a cynical smile. "Can you make out her name yet?"

"Yes, sir, as she swung around I saw the gilt letters shining. It is the *Volga*."

Captain Wrench bit his nether lip so hard that the keen white teeth drew the blood.

"The *Volga*!" he gasped, under his breath.

The boat was now very near the *Americus*, and Clarence Wrench saw from the uniform of the officer sitting on the bow that he was the captain of the steamer. As the boat ran under the stern of the *Americus* and stopped on the port side, the two captains saluted each other formally. Captain Wrench was a past-master in marine etiquette.

In another instant the Russian commander stood upon the deck of the *Americus*, while his boat, made fast to the whaler, was towed gently along as the light wind kept the latter moving ever so slightly.

"Captain Wrench?" asked the Russian, in English, but with marked foreign accent.

"Yes, sir."

"I am captain of the Russian cruiser, the *Volga*, cruising in the Arctic under special orders."

"Yes, sir," said Wrench. He was about to add: "What has all this to do with me?" but prudence restrained him, and he only bowed, as he acknowledge the other's remark.

"I shall have to search your vessel."

"What?"

The Black Bear's face became livid with rage, and his hand flew to his breast as if seeking for a weapon.

"I have orders to search the *Americus*, American whaler, for certain contraband liquors and other articles," went on the Russian captain, calmly, "and I hope that you will not object to

my carrying out my instructions. If you do, why, you see what will be the result."

He pointed to the Volga, which lay to within a quarter of a mile, and had her gun-ports open showing her teeth ready to send a broadside into the Americus at a second's notice.

"Captain—I beg your pardon! What is your name?" asked the Black Bear, with forced calmness.

"Nicoleff!"

"Thanks! Captain Nicoleff. Well, I wish to call your attention to the fact that the Americus is an American vessel, sailing under the protection of the United States flag, and that its business is of a peaceful, legitimate character."

"Um!"

"I do not recognize the right of any one, especially a foreigner, to come aboard my ship and search it without the fullest authority from the Government of the United States. The orders you say you have from the Russian Government are nothing to me. I do not recognize them, and if you attempt to carry out your threat to search the Americus, you will do it at your peril."

Captain Nicoleff smiled and looked significantly in the direction of his steamer.

"One wave of my hand and the Americus would be riddled from bowsprit to taffrail," he said, quietly.

Behind the Russian captain stood a young fellow, in the uniform of a midshipman, while grouped around were the four seamen who had manned the oars. All wore cutlasses, while in the belts of the two officers were revolvers.

"Wave your hand, and the movement will be the last for you in this world," hissed the Black Bear as he suddenly drew a revolver and pointed it at the head of Captain Nicoleff.

Like flashes of lightning five cutlasses—those of the midshipman and the seamen leaped from their scabbards and the revolver of Clarence Wrench was knocked from his hand and sent spinning into the sea.

Silas Hawkins, armed with a harpoon, and Wilfred Stokes, revolver in hand, were upon the Russian captain at once.

The cutlasses swung in the air, but with one sweep of his ponderous iron Silas disarmed two of the seamen, and would have brained the other two, had not the midshipman dextrously seized the end of the harpoon as it circled over Silas's head, disturbing his aim and causing the weapon to fall harmlessly to the deck.

Meanwhile Wilfred Stokes had flung himself upon Captain Nicoleff and with his fingers on the Russian's throat, seemed resolved to strangle him, when the Black Bear interposed.

"Release him," he commanded, sternly.

The first mate of the Americus obeyed without a word, and Silas Hawkins, who was about to annihilate the little midshipman, stood back and looked toward his captain for further orders.

"Captain Nicoleff, if you wish to search my ship I will make no resistance, but I warn you that you will be required to answer to the authorities at Washington for this outrage on a ship sailing under the protection of the Stars and Stripes."

Captain Nicoleff only bowed.

"I am prepared to accept all responsibility for my acts here," he said, after a pause. "I have information that you are supplying whisky to the Esquimaux on the Russian coast. My instructions are to prevent such trading, to board all vessels that I may suspect of engaging in the traffic and to seize all contraband property found on such vessels."

The Black Bear laughed sarcastically.

"Where would you like to begin?" he asked.

"In your cabin."

"Go ahead. You do not wish me to go with you, do you?"

"No, sir; it is not necessary."

"Thanks!"

The Black Bear was speaking with studied politeness, but it could be easily seen that he was holding back his indignant rage only by the most determined effort.

"We will go down through the forward hatchway first," announced Captain Nicoleff.

"Very well. Silas, show them the fore-castle, and allow them to have full run of the ship while they are on board."

"Jehosaphat!" grunted Silas under his breath, as, with a very bad grace, he slouched forward, Nicoleff and his five followers close behind him.

As they disappeared down the hatchway, Clarence Wrench's brow grew black as night, and he strode toward his cabin with muttered imprecations between his teeth that boded trouble for some one.

He glanced across the water to where the

Volga, with her propeller lazily turning so as to keep her abreast of the Americus, as the latter moved slowly along before the light breeze, looked a veritable thing of beauty upon the blue water.

The ice floe had now almost disappeared, having been taken by the current far away to the northwest, and the temperature had gone up several degrees in consequence, being actually mild to men who had become accustomed to breathing the air of northern latitudes.

"That's done," croaked a voice under him, as he marked the trim lines of the steamer, with eyes just then for nothing else.

"Eh?"

Pietro had shambled out of the companionway and along the deck, and was contentedly sitting cross-legged, at his feet, a favorite posture of his.

"I said, that's done."

"Well, where are they?"

"They are on the lower deck, eating roast lamb and drinking fresh water—all the luxuries of the season," laughed the dwarf.

"Well—Get up. I don't want to yell at you," said the captain, petulantly.

Pietro was on his feet at once, and standing on tip-toe, reached nearly to Clarence Wrench's shoulder.

The Black Bear stooped and whispered.

"Wh-a-a-a-t?"

The flabby face of the dwarf was drawn with the most horrible contortions. He was surprised, and, if his looks did not belie him, terrified beyond measure.

"It is a fact."

"Did he know you?"

"No. He only saw me once before, and then—"

"It was rather dark eh?" added the dwarf, with a ghastly grin. He was recovering somewhat from the fright caused by the Black Bear's whispered communication, and could enjoy the discomfiture of his companion.

"It was rather dark," assented the captain, gravely.

"It was in that little hut in Yakutsk, before you got Ivan Novritch safely into the mines, where he rotted with thousands of others in merry Siberia. Ha, ha! You are a slick one, Captain Wrench!"

"Hush, you devil!" hissed the Black Bear, as he clapped his hand over the wide mouth of the misshapen little wretch.

The dwarf pushed his hand away angrily.

"I know what I am talking about. You killed Ivan—"

"You lie!"

"Well, it was your fault that he died in Siberia. You needn't chop words with me. They'll consider that you killed him, and if you don't play your cards very neatly you'll wish that you never saw him."

"I shall play my cards neatly."

"With my help?"

"With your help."

"And suppose I won't have anything to do with it?"

"You will have something to do with it."

"I don't know that."

"I do."

"Why?"

"Because it is my will," hissed the Black Bear. "Moreover, refuse to obey my orders, and I'll have you hanged at the yard-arm for mutiny and inciting the crew to rebellion."

For a moment the two men looked fixedly into each other's eyes. Then the dwarf shrugged his shoulders and remarked:

"You're a pretty tough nut, captain. I only said that to see how you would take it. Of course I will help you. It is to my interest. You hold the deeds to half a million dollars' worth of property in Boston that rightfully belongs to the widow and daughter of Ivan Novritch—"

"Hush!"

"And," continued the dwarf, ignoring the other's warning, "the captain of the Volga turns out to be Ivan's brother, who has sworn to hunt down the man that caused his death—"

"Hush, will you?"

The heavy brows of the Black Bear lowered until they formed a bushy black line over his eyes, but he could not stop the terrible tongue of the imp with the flabby face.

"Luckily for you he does not know the name of the man. If he knew that it was Captain Wrench, and that he was the commander of the Americus, how long do you think you would be sailing in the Arctic as the skipper of a whaling vessel?"

"Pietro, what is the matter with you? I know all this, but there is no occasion to tell the

story where there may be listening ears, for all I know."

"Oh, no. We are alone. I don't want to give you away. But I want you to understand how things are," answered Pietro, carelessly.

"You say those two women are on the lower deck?"

"Yes."

"They must not be found by—by—"

"Call him Nicoleff. That's good enough. His first name is Nicoleff," suggested the dwarf.

"If he and they meet, everything will be revealed, and—"

"And then there will be trouble for you. What shall I do with them?"

"Finish them!" hissed the other. "No, stay! Let them down into the hold. They may live down there, and even if they don't, why—"

The dwarf winked with his one eye, and was about to say something in reply, but the Black Bear stopped him by walking swiftly toward the companionway.

"I'll go with you and see that it is properly done," he said over his shoulder, as Pietro shuffled after him.

The two disappeared down the companionway, and as they did so, Bob Burleigh stepped from behind the mainmast, with an expression in which horror struggled with triumph.

"So! I have found out more than I expected. It looks as if I should catch you upon more than one charge, my sweet-scented Captain Clarence Wrench. I do not think it will be long before I shall let you know that Bob Burleigh has another name—one that will make you tremble. Innocent, the College Detective! I like that sobriquet somehow. It has a scholarly sound that puts crooked gentry off their guard!"

CHAPTER V.

TRAPPED!

BOB BURLEIGH'S usual light-hearted demeanor seemed to change as he soliloquized, and it was easy to believe that he was the astute detective whose gentle manner, together with the fact that he had been educated at Harvard, had procured for him the title of "Innocent, the College Detective." It was true that he was the son of the famous Boston lawyer, Burleigh, but no one was allowed to know that the young man was employed in secret service against criminals when it was possible to hide the fact. With the exception of the police, and such offenders as had reason to know him, few people were aware that the young fellow was anything more than an assistant in his father's office, when he was not traveling about the world enjoying himself.

Just now, as he turned over in his mind rapidly a dozen plans of action, there was nothing of the "gilded youth" about him, and it was easy enough to understand that he was one whose name would be a terror to those evil-doers that knew him.

He had paid but little attention to Pauline and Marie after they had been installed in Clarence Wrench's cabin. He had no desire to intrude upon them, and he had gone forward to the fore-castle, where he liked to listen to the yarns of the old salts who had sailed in every sea, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, and had something startling to tell of every voyage they had made since they first shipped before the mast.

He had come on deck just as the Black Bear had told the Russian captain that he could search the ship, and had not seen anything of the scrimmage that had preceded the permission.

He had not seen the face of Nicoleff, and would not have recognized him if he had, but now that he had heard the conversation of Pietro and Wrench, he knew who he was, and was considerably enlightened on a matter that had hitherto been rather foggy to him.

"I must save those two women at any risk," he muttered. "After that perhaps I shall be able to do justice to Ivan Novritch's memory, as well as to his wife and daughter. A special Providence must have sent them to the Americus. And then to think of Ivan's brother being here, too! Well, well, truth is stranger than fiction, after all."

Quick to decide, as he always was, Bob Burleigh (for we will continue to call him by his own name), went below, by way of the fore-castle, nodding carelessly to Silas Hawkins, who had not yet got over his indignation at the Russian seamen.

Captain Nicoleff and his men were not to be seen, but Bob rightly conjectured that they would make their way to the lower deck, and he sought one of the traps that led to it, and

went down the ladder into the gloom without hesitation.

Looking along over the barrels and lumber in the place, he saw the blinking lamps carried by some of the Russian seamen, and made his way to them as quickly as possible.

"Lift that rope," said Nicoleff, in Russian, to one of his men.

The order was obeyed, and several boxes, that might have contained anything, but that the experienced eye of Nicoleff recognized at once as the cases in which jugs of fiery whisky were usually packed for consignment to the Esquimaux, were revealed.

"What have you found?" put in Bob.

The Russian captain looked at the young man inquiringly, and with some sternness replied in English:

"Contraband articles, sir. Are you an officer of this ship?"

"No, sir."

"Not an ordinary seaman, eh?" glancing at Bob's costume, and noting the air of refinement that asserted itself, despite the rough clothing.

"Well, no. I am—" He whispered in the other's ear.

"Can you prove that?"

For answer, Bob threw open his coat and thick shirt, showing a silver medal suspended by a stout cord from his neck.

Nicoleff examined the inscription upon it by the light of one of the lamps and then offered his hand to the young man.

The latter took it and gave it a peculiar pressure.

It was the Masonic grip.

"You have something more than the badge?" asked the captain.

"Certainly. I have my regular papers in a secret compartment of my sea-chest."

"That is good. You can show me them at a more convenient time. In the mean time, what do you suspect?"

"That I will tell you later on. It is not necessary for me to say that I have other objects in being aboard the *Americus* besides the mere enjoyment of the cruise."

"I suppose so."

At this moment a dark face, under a bearskin cap, peered around a bale of goods a few yards away from the speakers, and disappeared again.

"If I help you in this matter you have in hand, I suppose you will give me assistance. I have got everything in train. I have established the evidence that I required, and I am anxious to turn Captain Wrench and his precious adjutant, Pietro, into the hands of the United States authorities as soon as possible. Then I think it would be well to blow the *Americus* out of the water, for I believe she is too corrupt ever to serve an honest purpose again."

"How are the crew?"

"All innocent—except Pietro. They really have been hunting whales, and we already have considerable baleen and some oil aboard. But of course whaling is only a cloak for the other business."

Again the dark face under the black bearskin appeared for an instant like a vision of evil.

"Curse you, you viper! Lucky I've found you out in time," muttered Clarence Wrench, as he withdrew into his concealment and waited for further developments.

"You say they take on most of the stuff at San Francisco, eh?" asked Nicoleff.

"Yes. There is a fence there who receives stolen property from every city in the United States. The *Americus* is only one of several vessels that carries it away, but Captain Wrench and Pietro are the managers of the scheme," answered Bob.

"Have they much on board now?"

"Yes; some \$50,000 worth, mostly in diamonds. The settings have been melted down long ago. When there is a trying-out of blubber it is easy enough to rig up a small furnace for melting down gold and silver, you know."

"But that is not all that you told me?"

"No. The counterfeiting is of course a prominent feature of the business, but all the other things help."

"Precisely?"

Without further conversation, Nicoleff helped his men to turn over the rubbish around him, and soon unearthed two more cases containing jugs of whisky.

Bob Burleigh was about to lift one of the cases away, when he stopped and listened intently.

"By heavens! I had forgotten that. They are down there—under our feet," he shouted.

"What?" asked Nicoleff, infected by his companion's excitement.

"Pauline Novritch and her daughter Marie."

I heard Wrench and that little monster say they would do it, but it slipped my memory for an instant."

"Pauline Novritch! Marie! What do you mean?" demanded the Russian captain, trembling with anxiety.

"I mean that they are the prisoners of Clarence Wrench, and that he is murdering them, even while we are talking."

"Great heavens! What shall we do?"

"Follow me!" answered Bob, as, seizing one of the smoky lanterns, he dashed into the darkness, over barrels, boxes, ropes, bales of sailcloth and the other heterogeneous matters which filled the narrow space between decks.

"See! Here is the entrance to the hold. They are down here!"

He had pulled up a trap as he spoke, and showed a horrible, dark pit, fouler than the place in which they stood, access to which was given by a steep ladder.

Without hesitation Bob Burleigh let himself down the ladder, and found himself up to his ankles in bilge-water.

He was quickly followed by Nicoleff, and his five men, who tried to show by their lanterns where they were.

With the exception of the large masses of iron used for ballast, and a number of barrels, some full of whale-oil and others empty, it was difficult to tell what there was in the hold. The lanterns gave no light save in their immediate vicinity, and they might have been in a cavern at the bottom of the sea for all that they could distinguish of their surroundings.

"Ivan! Ivan!" cried a faint voice.

"Pauline!" answered Nicoleff, as he hurried away into the black darkness, regardless of where he might find himself at last.

Bob Burleigh followed closely. He felt that hesitation might mean death for the two helpless women.

"Pauline!" repeated the Russian captain.

"Here I am. Oh! Can it be? Nicoleff?"

"Yes, indeed, Nicoleff!" he replied.

"Then I am saved."

The light held by Bob Burleigh flashed upon the face of Pauline Novritch, as she lay extended upon a mattress laid upon some barrels. By her side sat her daughter, who seemed now to have reversed the former state of things, and to have taken charge of her mother.

The next minute Nicoleff had clasped the hands of mother and daughter, and was pouring words of encouragement into their ears.

"Well, now, *ain't* she a daisy?"

The words were uttered in clear-cut English, and evidently proceeded from some one in an ecstasy of admiration.

Bob Burleigh turned quickly, and the light of his lantern flashed full upon the face of the Russian midshipman, who in his showy uniform, was regarding the beautiful daughter of Pauline Novritch with a stolid look of appreciation such as an American youth bestows upon a favorite base-ball player.

It could not be this quiet young Russian that had emitted such a distinctively American sentence. Yet there was no one else.

"Did you speak?" asked Bob at last.

"Well, now, you bet yer boots I did! I know a pretty girl whenever I see one, and I say she's a daisy."

"Why, where—where—are you from?"

"Boston, Massachusetts—your own town. I know you, too. You are Innocent, the Detective," answered the boy coolly.

"Well, you are a mystery," ejaculated Bob.

"Oh, no. I found I couldn't get to Annapolis—hadn't the influence. So I just worked it through my father's friend, Nicoleff Novritch, to try a cruise under the Russian flag, so long as there was no quarrel with Uncle Sam. But I've had enough of it, and I hope to be home again by this time next year."

Nicoleff was too much occupied with Pauline and Marie to notice anything else, and the boy continued:

"Now, see here, Innocent: I've taken a fancy to you, and I am going to see you through the wickedest time you ever had. That black, sneaking scoundrel, Clarence Wrench, doesn't know I am American, and he didn't care what he said before me. He thought I didn't understand United States. Ha, ha, ha! Well, he'll find that Bert Murray knows a little too much for him, sure as you're born. You bet I can play Russian when I have to, but when I play American I get there with both feet. You hear me."

As he spoke, the lad placed his hand significantly upon the hilt of his cutlass, and looked as if he would have liked to take part in a battle at that moment.

"Come along, Pauline. Lean on me. We will get out of this place at once. I will confront this man, Wrench, charge him with his attempt on your life, and take the *Americus* a prisoner, to be turned over to the authorities either in Sitka or at San Francisco."

"Frisco will be the better place, on account of the business of which I told you," interrupted Bob Burleigh.

Nicoleff agreed at once, and leading Pauline, he was stumbling toward the spot under the opening to the deck above, when a pistol-shot echoed through the hold and a bullet flattened itself against a mass of iron ballast within a foot of the Russian captain.

"You confounded fool! Why did you do that?" growled the harsh voice of Captain Wrench.

"For fun! Do you want it all yourself?" returned Pietro's voice, defiantly.

Neither of the speakers could be seen, but a loud slam told those in the hold that the trap had been closed, and that they were prisoners at the pleasure of a man who had shown that no sense of right or wrong would deter him from crime, and who was the possessor of so much reckless daring that it was hopeless to attempt to play upon his fears.

CHAPTER VI.

A BOLD EXPEDITION.

"So! That makes things safe for the present," muttered the Black Bear, as he helped Pietro shoot the bolts that secured the trap leading to the hold. "They may stay down there and suffocate or starve, or whatever they please, until I am ready to let them out."

"When will that be?" asked the dwarf, as a sardonic grin overspread his flabby face and closed up his one eye.

"Never mind. Come on deck."

Clarence Wrench was in no mood to be questioned. He was in deep thought. A bold enterprise had suggested itself to him as soon as Captain Nicoleff had gone below on the search expedition, and he was maturing it rapidly now.

When he stepped on deck everything was quiet and orderly there. Silas Hawkins was busy with his harpoons and lines, while the men on watch were moving about and doing what they could, as usual, to keep everything taut and shipshape.

The broad, white sails were spread to catch the light breeze, and the course of the vessel, being westerly, would soon take the *Americus* around the headland known as East Cape, on the Siberian Coast into the open Arctic.

About a quarter of a mile away the Volga maintained its relative position abreast of the *Americus*, with her guns ready for immediate action.

"Shows her teeth prettily," commented the Black Bear, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Be all up with us if she was to bite once," added the dwarf.

"She won't bite. I'll take care of that."

"Oh!"

"Pietro."

"Yes."

"Listen."

"I'm all ears."

"How many of the crew can we depend upon?"

The dwarf cogitated for a moment. Then, placing a finger knowingly to the side of his nose, he whispered:

"All of them, if they are handled right."

"What do you mean?"

"Make them think that the Russians are trying to play dirt on us, and they will do anything you tell them."

"I see. Call Hawkins and Mr. Stokes."

The dwarf obeyed, and the two men stood before the Black Bear, wondering what was coming next. The captain addressed himself to Silas, though his words were intended for Wilfred Stokes also.

"Silas, you see that steamer over there?"

"Wal, neow, she's a 'tarnal big thing. Heow could I help seein' her?"

"If you knew that she was trying to capture the *Americus*, an American vessel, what would you do?"

"What would I dew?" repeated Silas, as his weather-beaten face reddened more than ever at the thought of such an indignity. "Dew? Just let her try it, an' I'll show yeon what I'd dew!"

"The infernal foreigner wouldn't dare to try it," put in Wilfred Stokes, and he placed his hand on the revolver in the pocket of his overcoat.

"He would, for he has."
 "No!" cried Stokes. "Where is the captain?"

"Yes, whar is he? Darn his fluffy head! Why, I'll brain him with a whale-iron. That's what I'll dew," broken in Silas again.

Pietro chuckled and rubbed his hands stealthily. He saw that his plan was working splendidly.

"I have him and his people safe below, and I am going to keep them there," said the Black Bear, savagely.

"Good for yeou, Captain Wrench," cried Silas, shaking his head in satisfaction.

"Now, my intention is to take that steamer and run her down to 'Frisco, where I will hand her over to the United States authorities, together with her captain and crew. That will mean a reward for every man on the Americus, for the Volga is nothing more than a pirate, carrying the Russian flag as a blind."

Pietro made a sly grimace. He was actually astonished at the audacity of the Black Bear in telling such a story, and still more at the ease with which it gained credence with his listeners. Perhaps Mr. Stokes had some misgivings. If he had, he judged it prudent not to give them utterance. He knew Clarence Wrench too well for that. As for Silas, the captain's word was law with him, and he hated foreigners, anyhow. The bare suggestion of an insult to the American flag was enough for him, and he would have fought the whole crew of the Volga, officers and all, in its defense, if needs were.

It was evening by this time, and already the Arctic sun was very low in the heavens. Another hour and it would be dark.

The Black Bear looked over the port side of the vessel, where, it will be remembered, the Volga's boat was being towed out of sight of the steamer.

"Muffle the oars of that boat, and lower away your own boat, Silas," he commanded.

"Ay, ay, sir. But my boat is towing on the starboard side yet. We didn't haul her up since we brung them two weemen from the ice this mornin'."

"That is so. I had forgotten. Well, haul her around to the other side of the ship, so that she won't be seen from the steamer. Then have her oars muffled."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You will take command of her. Mr. Stokes and Pietro will come with me in the Volga's boat. Arm all your men with cutlasses and six-shooters, and tell them that they may have to use them."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Wait until it is dark, and then be ready to start immediately."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The Black Bear, attended by Pietro, walked away to his cabin, while Silas Hawkins proceeded to execute the orders of the captain, and the first mate, Wilfred Stokes, paced the deck uneasily, wondering what new wickedness was contemplated by the Black Bear.

Once in the privacy of his cabin, Captain Wrench, after carefully examining the curtains and door at the end of the apartment, to make sure that there were no eavesdroppers, unfolded the rest of his plans to Pietro.

"We will row over there in the darkness, and try and board her before we are discovered."

"Good!" croaked the dwarf.

"If they see us we must pretend that we are her own people. For that reason our boat only must be seen. Silas must keep behind, but be ready to help us when the tug of war comes."

"Well?"

"Once on board, it becomes a question of nerve and pluck. We must get their crew under hatches and take possession."

"Then we will steam away for 'Frisco, eh?"

The dwarf looked with his one eye straight into the face of the Black Bear. The latter almost smiled, and indeed so nearly did so that Pietro understood the slight contortion of the captain's visage.

"We shall probably not go to San Francisco right away," he said. "I may have to take the Volga in another direction first."

"You are sure that you will capture her, then?"

"Yes."

It was but one word, but the tone in which it was uttered was one of perfect confidence.

"Good. That's what I like about him," muttered the dwarf to himself.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. I was only clearing my throat."

For an hour the two men sat opposite each other, on either side of the table, the captain smoking a fragrant Havana cigar, and the

dwarf pulling away at a short black clay pipe filled with the strongest tobacco.

It was quite dark when the Black Bear broke the silence with:

"Come, Pietro."

"I'm ready."

"I wonder—" commenced Clarence Wrench, and then stopped.

"I know what you wonder," chuckled the dwarf. "You would like to know what our friends are doing down in the hold. It's—"

"Hush!"

"Is it time to start, sir?" broke in the voice of Wilfred Stokes, as the first mate stood on the stairway and looked into the cabin.

The captain had seen him in time to stop the rather too freely wagging tongue of Pietro.

"Yes, Mr. Stokes. Tell Silas to man his boat. I am coming at once."

"And what shall I do?"

"You will come with me."

"But, captain, who is to take command of the Americus? You know we are terribly short of officers. There is no one we can trust."

The Black Bear hesitated and bit his lip. For reasons of his own he would have preferred that his first mate should accompany him on his expedition.

"Well, I suppose you are right. We cannot leave the Americus to take care of itself. You will have to stay, and I will do as well as I can with Pietro."

The three men went on deck. It was very dark, and the lights on the Volga in the distance looked like stars in the black firmament that seemed to reach to the surface of the dark sea.

On board the Americus all was bustle, but without noise. Silas Hawkins had his crew all ready. He had just looked them over to see that their cutlasses were properly secured in their belts, and that their revolvers were fully charged with six cartridges each.

His large boat, furnished, as usual, with all the paraphernalia for whale-catching—harpoons and coils of rope, well-soaped, in tubs—rocked softly under the bow of the ship. The oars had all been carefully muffled with old sails, and it would be possible to row without a sound save that caused by the dip of the oars in the sea.

"Keep a little behind me, Silas," said Captain Wrench, in low tones, "but watch me closely. As soon as I want you to come I will blow one blast on my whistle."

He held up a small silver whistle, with whose shrill note Silas Hawkins was thoroughly familiar, for it was often used as a signal when the elements made too much noise for a voice to be heard.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the Yankee.

"Very well. Now, Pietro!"

The dwarf swung himself over the side of the vessel, and with the agility of a monkey, let himself down by a rope, into the boat belonging to the Volga.

"Come on, Cap," he croaked.

The Black Bear signed to the four seamen who were to man the oars, and they, without a word, slid down the rope and took their respective places. There may have been a feeling of exultation in their bosoms over the prospect of a tussle, for they were American sailors, but they knew better than to make any sign of their emotions in the presence of Captain Clarence Wrench. He would have made them suffer for such a breach of discipline, in the very teeth of an enemy, and they knew it.

"Now, remember, Silas. Keep out of sight until I call you," said the Black Bear, as he held up his silver whistle, significantly.

Silas responded with his usual "Ay, ay, sir," and at once manned his boat, and cast off from the Americus.

"Steady all," he whispered, to his men, as he waited for the other boat to get headway.

The Black Bear, armed to the teeth, sat in the stern of his boat, steering straight for the Volga, whose black outline could hardly be distinguished but whose lights showed exactly her position.

"Fun, eh?" observed Pietro, dryly, as he sat close to the captain.

"Yes—for the people on the Volga."

"And for the Americus crew, too, if I know anything."

"You do not know anything."

"Oh!"

The muffled oars struck the calm sea in regular cadence, but the splash they made was not more audible than the natural lap of the waves. It was not very cold, considering the latitude—but a few degrees below freezing—and the work at the oars kept the men comfortable, while Wrench and Pietro, wrapped in their overcoats, were as warm as they desired to be.

About a hundred yards behind came the

boatswain, his crew rowing steadily, but slowly, so as to keep at a respectful distance from the Black Bear.

The hull of the Russian steamer now became more distinct, seeming, as the first boat approached it, to rise out of the water higher and higher, until it became gigantic.

"Boat ahoy!" suddenly rung out a voice, in Russian, from the deck of the Volga, as a decided bustle could be discerned among a few dark forms appearing above the bulwarks.

"Captain Nicoleff," answered Pietro, disguising his voice as well as he could, so that it would pass for that of the Russian captain at a pinch.

The answer evidently satisfied the Volga's officers, for a rope ladder was let down, and two men leaped into the main chains and stood by to await the approach of the supposed Captain Nicoleff to climb up into the vessel.

"Now comes the tug," whispered the Black Bear to Pietro, as he stooped and picked up the uniform hat of the Russian captain from the bottom of the boat and placed it on his head in lieu of his black bearskin.

Pietro did the same with the little midshipman's hat, which, fortunately for the Americus people, had been left on the main deck, with that of Captain Nicoleff, when the two plunged into the confined space of the lower deck searching for contraband goods. Had Nicoleff and Bert Murray been less careful of their gilt-trimmed, showy hats it might have been more difficult than it was for the Black Bear to have pursued his designs upon the Russian steamer.

CHAPTER VII.

CUT AND THRUST.

"EASY," commanded Wrench, in a low tone to his men, and Pietro repeated the word, putting up his hand warningly.

The crew, like machines, obeyed, but they could not repress the quickened breath that showed they were ready for the fight that appeared to be imminent. They interpreted the word "Easy," to mean stop rowing, understanding at once that it was to give Silas an opportunity to come up to them.

"Row all," whispered the captain again, as he saw the other boat coming steadily forward.

In another instant the Black Bear was on the rope ladder, with Pietro close behind him. The four seamen had unshipped their oars, after making the boat fast to a rope that had been thrown overboard from the Volga, and were now crowding toward the stern, ready to run up the ladder and overcome the unsuspecting Russians.

The Black Bear held his silver whistle in his mouth, but forbore to blow it until the last moment. He knew that the sound would give warning to the Russians that something was wrong, and he would prefer to take possession of the steamer by strategy rather than force. Bloodshed, he knew, would be difficult to account for satisfactorily, should he be ever brought to justice.

He stepped into the chains, averting his face so that the two soldiers holding the rope ladder should not obtain a full view of him. The darkness favored his deception, and the men allowed him to pass without any suspicion that the stately figure was other than that of Captain Nicoleff.

Pietro, was the next, but the sailors, after seeing the top of his head, and that he had reached the chains in safety, coolly let go of the rope and walked away. They were not disposed to take trouble for a mere midshipman, and certainly not for their own companions, the foremastmen who followed him up the ladder.

As the Black Bear reached the deck he touched his hat to the first officer, who stood respectfully near, and passed on toward the open companionway leading to the captain's state-room. The motion of raising his hand enabled Wrench to partly hide his face, and thus prevent an awkward discovery that might have taken place.

"Come!" he said, as he paused at the head of the stairway, and beckoned to the Russian officer.

The latter walked quickly toward his supposed superior, thus enabling Pietro to come on deck without it being revealed that he was not the active young midshipman, Bert Murray. The misshapen form of the dwarf, his bowed legs and large head, would have betrayed him at once, even in the thick gloom, if the Russian officer had looked straight at him.

The crew of the Volga had gone forward, and there was no one in the vicinity save the man at the wheel—who was mechanically keeping the head of the ship toward the west—and the

second officer, on the bridge, walking backward and forward, and waiting for his watch to end. The engines were working very slowly—about quarter speed—and the hot breath from the engine-room came up in gusts that reached sometimes to the bridge, and made the young fellow, in his tightly-buttoned overcoat, think longingly of the warmth and comfort below.

The first officer was a few yards from Captain Wrench, when the latter, without turning, said, in Russian:

"Go forward and put the whole crew under hatches."

"Sir?"

"I have my reasons."

"What, do you suspect—"

"Mutiny. Yes. Do as I tell you. Make some excuse, so as not to arouse suspicions, and when you have carried out my orders, come to me in my cabin."

The first officer saluted, and went rapidly to the other end of the ship to carry out his strange commission.

"That whaler seems to have a spell over it," he muttered, in his own language. "I wish the captain would let me give her a broadside. I don't feel as if the Volga were safe for a moment while the Americus is allowed to float. As for that captain of hers, the Black Bear, I believe he is the very devil himself."

Pietro stood in the shadow of the bridge as the Russian passed him, and he listened to this soliloquy with a grin that expanded his flabby face from ear to ear.

The four seamen from the Americus were hiding near Pietro, in response to a command from him, and the officer passed on without noticing any of them.

"Now, Pietro," whispered the Black Bear, as the dwarf and the four sailors stood at his side, "go into the cabin and fasten the doors leading to the main-deck, so that no one can get up that way. That fool of a Russian will look after the forward hatchways, and we shall have them all below as helpless as rats in a trap."

"And then?"

"That is further along," returned Captain Wrench, significantly.

"Doyle," said the dwarf to one of the four sailors, "can you see the boatswain's boat?"

"Yes, sorr; she be roight under our lee, sorr."

The Black Bear frowned at this assumption of authority by his familiar; but though at any time he would have resented, in a way that could be felt, the giving of orders by any one else in his presence, he deemed it prudent to swallow the effront at this time. He kept it stored away in his memory for the future benefit of honest Pietro, notwithstanding.

The dwarf, if he knew that he had done anything to offend the Black Bear, did not show it in his demeanor. He simply walked away into the darkness, to carry out the latter's orders, chuckling to himself as the humorous aspect of the enterprise struck him more forcibly every moment.

When he got below, the dwarf turned and shook his fist at the ceiling of the cabin, at the spot where he supposed Captain Wrench was standing.

"You fool!" he hissed. "You think you have Pietro under your thumb—that he is bound to you body and soul. Wait and see, my fine fellow. I'll cut the Black Bear's claws yet, and I'll make money out of it at the same time that I get revenge."

He did what he came for, however, despite his expressed hatred for the man that he served. There were two doors leading from the state-room to the other portion of the main-deck, where most of the crew were assembled ready to handle the guns at a moment's notice. These doors he locked and bolted, and then, with a final glance around in admiration of the cozy character of the apartment, went on deck.

He was just in time to see the Black Bear step coolly up to the helmsman, and quickly seizing him by the throat, bear him to the deck, nearly insensible and wholly powerless.

One of the Americus crew—none other than the Doyle referred to above—took the wheel, and the captain, seizing a convenient rope, took a few turns around the arms and legs of the prostrate Russian, and had him so tightly bound that it seemed as if he must be benumbed for the rest of his life if he escaped immediate annihilation.

"Take that down-stairs," growled the Black Bear, giving the prisoner a slight kick of contempt.

He was picked up by the remaining three sailors and borne into the captain's state-room, where he was laid upon the floor and left to chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, and

reflect upon the strange chances in the life of a seaman.

It was very dark now, and the Black Bear felt pretty certain that his bold attempt to capture the Russian cruiser would be entirely successful. There was only the second officer to be overcome now, and, as he was entirely alone, that would be easily accomplished.

The bell forward here sounded eight.

"Eight bells," muttered the captain. "I will give it to them myself."

The heavy gong abaft the mainmast was right by his side. He picked up the hammer used for striking it, and caused eight heavy, deep-toned notes to float out upon the air.

"There! That reminds me of my old navy service, years ago," he said to himself, softly. "Ah, I was young and innocent in those days!"

If there was a moment of regret for those days, gone forever, it passed over at once, and the Black Bear was the same pitiless, stern man as usual when he blew a short sharp blast on his silver whistle.

Silas must have been very close, for the sound seemed hardly to have given itself to the breeze ere the boatswain was on deck, followed by his eight men.

The Russian officer could hardly make out in the darkness what was taking place, but he knew that something was wrong, and he touched the electric button that communicated with a bell in the captain's state-room, and another one to summon the boatswain from the fore-castle.

His finger was yet on the button when a powerful arm was thrown around his neck, and he was dragged backward by a force that his utmost resistance could not shake off.

"Surrender!" hissed a voice in his ear in Russian.

"Never!" he answered, in the same language.

He was trying to get his hand on the handle of his sword, determined to sell his life dearly. What it all meant he did not know, but he had a hazy idea that the crew of the Volga had mutinied, and that he was in the hands of one of the men whom he had been accustomed to command.

By an almost superhuman effort he managed to draw his sword, and at the same time throw off his assailant.

He saw a tall, powerful man, whom even in the gloom he knew to be a stranger on board the cruiser. With a shout of execration and defiance he cut viciously, with a round-arm swing, at his unknown foe.

The latter was too quick for him. Cutlass in hand, he parried the stroke of the young Russian, and returned it with his own weapon.

But the second officer was well trained in the use of arms, and could not be easily cut down.

Cut, thrust, parry, thrust, recover, slash, cut! Like lightning the two weapons crossed, recrossed, clashed, and struck fire.

"*Sacre!*" hissed the Black Bear. He always swore in French when very much excited, thereby revealing his Gallic origin unmistakably.

The Russian with clinched teeth said nothing. He needed all his breath to sustain him in this fearful and entirely unexpected combat.

"Surrender, or—" snarled the Black Bear, as he pressed his opponent to the very end of the bridge.

For answer, the Russian fought with redoubled energy, forcing the other back in his turn, and giving him, in spite of his gigantic strength and undoubted skill with his weapon, all that he could do to avoid a death-stroke from the Russian's sword.

"Ah!" he gasped, as his guard was beaten partly down, and he felt a sting in his sword arm.

The sting meant a slight cut that had gone through the bearskin sleeve and drawn blood. But for the thickness of the sleeve the battle had ended there, with the Black Bear's discomfiture.

The wound made Captain Wrench furious. He felt the blood trickling down his arm, and he did not know how badly he was wounded. He must finish up this affair at once.

While fighting with his right hand he took from his bosom with his left his silver whistle, which he placed to his mouth. Then he blew it, again, and again, and again.

The Russian although he was unconscious of all that had taken place, and did not understand where Captain Wrench had come from, surmised something near the truth, and knew that this whistle was to summon assistance for the giant who was, single-handed, more than his match. He felt, like his antagonist, that a decisive blow must be struck by one of them to end the duel, but was determined to strike it

himself if possible, instead of allowing his foe to do so.

There was a certain maneuver that he had not used in the fight—a twist of the wrist that would if circumstances favored him, enable him to cut under his opponent's guard, and, by a rapid movement, slash the forearm that he had already managed to wound. This maneuver he had not hitherto brought into operation, both because it was extremely difficult, and would, if it failed in its object, leave him at the mercy of the Black Bear's cutlass.

Now, when the ominous whistle had summoned him, he knew not how many new foes, he determined that this particular stroke was the only thing that could by any possibility save him from death or defeat.

Grasping his sword yet more firmly, he put himself entirely on the defensive, allowing the Black Bear to chase him up and down the bridge, and not attempting to strike back. He was gathering up his energies for the cut and thrust that would mean either victory or annihilation.

The quick breathing of the combatants, who were both feeling the effects of their exertions, sounded like the panting of small engines. The perspiration poured down their faces, and they were as hot as the fireman far below them in the engine room, with its great blazing furnaces and oily atmosphere.

"Surrender, you whelp! *Sacr-r-r-re!*" snarled Wrench, as he made a particularly vicious pass at the young Russian.

For answer, the other ran at him, and parrying the blow, dexterously twisted his sword around the other's cutlass, and sent it flying from his hand.

"*Sacre!*"

For a second the Russian's sword flashed over his head, and was coming down with resistless force upon the Black Bear's shoulder, when another blade struck it with tremendous force, knocking it to one side. It came down, certainly, because nothing could stop it, but so diverted from its original aim, that it missed the captain of the Americus altogether.

The next minute four men were upon the brave young officer, and he was bound as securely as the helmsman.

"Take him below with the other fellow," ordered the Black Bear, in mocking tones. "He made a good fight and he needs a rest!"

Without a word, four of the seamen from the Americus picked up the second officer of the Volga, as if he had been a baby, and, carrying him into the state-room, laid him on the floor, with his head resting on the chest of the other prisoner.

CHAPTER VIII.

BURT MURRAY MAKES FUN.

LET us now return to the captives in the hold of the Americus.

When the trap-door was slammed down after the ineffective shot from Pietro's revolver, Bob Burleigh ran and stumbled, lantern in hand, to the place where the steep ladder ascended to the deck over their heads. In a moment he was at the top of the ladder, pushing with all his force at the trap-door. He might as well have tried to push out the side of the ship.

The mocking laughter of the dwarf could be faintly distinguished, as Pietro and Clarence Wrench made their way to the outer air, and Bob ground his teeth as he realized that he and his companion were powerless to interfere with any of the lawless proceedings that he knew were contemplated.

"If I could only make my boys on the Volga know," murmured Captain Nicoleff, as he watched the futile attempt of Bob Burleigh to open the trap-door.

"Well, don't you think it can be done, captain?" asked Bert Murray, quietly.

"How?"

The boy did not reply. He did not wish to reveal a plan he had in his mind until he had proved it to be practicable, but he thought it would be possible to get out of the hold and stop the Black Bear's villainy, if an energetic attempt were made.

Entirely below the surface of the water, there was no chance of light penetrating the hold from the outside, and with the exception of the three oil lamps, in the hands of two of the four seamen and the detective, the place was in pitchy darkness.

Bob came slowly and disconsolately down the ladder and looked in the faces of the captain and the two ladies. He was not despairing, but his expression was decidedly one of disappointment and disgust.

"Curse him!" he muttered. "Who would have thought of his playing such a trick as that?"

He's as slippery as an eel, and now he has found me out—as I am confident he has—I shall have to play him carefully to land him. It will be troublesome to even angle for him while I am held down in this awful pit."

"What did you say, Innocent?" asked Bert.

The detective started as the unusual name fell upon his ears. He recovered himself at once, however, and answered carelessly:

"Oh, nothing. I was only talking to myself."

"What are we to do now?" questioned Nicoleff, as he took the hand of Marie reassuringly in his own, and nodded to Pauline.

"Is every opening of the deck above secured?" asked the latter. Save when the natural weakness of a woman succumbed under hardship and excitement, she was equal to most emergencies.

"The best way to find that out would be to examine them," suggested Bert.

The detective smiled as he muttered: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings—"

"Eh!" interrupted Bert, sharply.

"Nothing."

"Yes, but you *did* say something. I want you to understand that 'babes and sucklings,' as you call them, can sometimes get in and out—where larger people get left. Just as sure as you are born!"

The boy spoke with considerable heat and seemed to be inclined to fight with everybody present except the two ladies. The expression "babes and sucklings" had hurt his manly feelings, and he was fully prepared to vindicate himself at a moment's notice.

"Bert, you are a good fellow, and I am sorry if I have offended you. Shake hands, will you not?"

The detective put out his hand as he spoke and the lad grasped it warmly. From that moment the detective and Bert Murray were friends till death.

"The trap at the top of this ladder is firm. That I can assure you," added the detective, after the formal burial of the hatchet by Bert and himself, as they all gathered around in the light of the oil lamps, the four seamen standing respectfully a little in the background.

Bert shinned up the ladder and gave the trap a hard push to corroborate the declaration of the detective. Then he ran down, and snatching a lamp from one of the seamen, he disappeared into the darkness, though his progress was punctuated by the tumbles and knocks he got as he scrambled over barrels and general lumber.

He had a defined purpose in what he was doing, however. He had seen, with the quickness natural to his nationality, age and temperament, that there was a small opening to the deck over his head through which he, a small, active lad, might climb.

"Bob," he called, for the detective had told him that he preferred not to be called Innocent. It sounded too much like a character in a farce-comedy.

"Halloa!" answered the detective.

"Come and give me a lift."

The party went toward the place whence the voice of the boy proceeded.

"Why, what are you doing, Bert?" asked Bob Burleigh, as he burst out laughing.

All the rest save Bert, joined in the merriment. The boy considered his situation very serious, and was not disposed toward mirth.

A long shute extended from the top of the hold into its very depths. Upon this shute Bert Murray had climbed, attempting to make his way to the small opening already referred to. About half-way up, a splinter had caught the back of his jacket, and he had slipped at the same moment. The consequence was that he hung upside down, caught by the splinter, and was as helpless as a trussed turkey.

"Get me out of this fix, Bob, won't you? I'll have to stay here for the rest of my life if you don't."

The detective scrambled up the shute, and holding to the side, lifted the boy bodily from his awkward position.

"Thanks, Innocent, awfully. Now, let me show you what I was after when I was so rudely stopped in my wild career."

Bert carefully climbed up to the top of the shute and disappeared, the detective holding his lantern close to the heels of the lad when they vanished, with a struggle, apparently through the solid wood overhead.

A moment later his voice, muffled, cried:

"Say, Innocent, come up here."

The detective obeyed, and then saw that a trap-door at the top of the shute was open a little way, leaving an opening through which the boy had squeezed to the deck above.

"How did you get through, Bert?" asked Bob

Burleigh, examining with some surprise the small space.

"It was a little larger than that, but it has closed again. There is a big pile of stuff on top of the door that is likely to fall on it at any moment."

"Can't we raise the trap so that I can crawl through, eh?" asked the detective.

"We might try it."

The lad seized an iron ring in the trap and pulled with all his might. At the same time the detective pushed from below.

"Push, Innocent. She's coming!" gasped the boy.

A violent tug and shove and Bob Burleigh had forced his way through the opening, just as the trap closed with a loud slam.

"That settles it," exclaimed Bob. "There are about twenty tons of oil and other stuff on the trap now. See how it has shifted. We never could get that trap open again."

"But we must. We cannot leave them down there," said the detective, as he ground his teeth in excitement.

"Certainly not. I only say that we cannot get them out the way we came."

"Well, well, this is no time to stand talking. Come back here to the other hole. We can easily unbolt it and let them out that way."

The two made their way along the lower deck, which has already been described, until they came to the trap-door where Pietro had fired his shot, and had afterward made it fast.

"Hello, there! What are you doing?" broke in the voice of Wilfred Stokes the first mate.

"We want to look into the hold," replied Bob.

"Mr. Burleigh, I am in command of the *Americus* in the absence of Captain Wrench. I cannot allow any tampering with the arrangements of this ship. That boy is one of the prisoners in my charge. I am afraid that you have been assisting him to escape. I will put him back in the hold, and then I must request you to come on deck with me. I wish to speak to you."

Wilfred Stokes, holding a lantern in his hand, looked pale and worried in its flickering light, but there was an expression of determination in his face that showed he would do his duty as he understood it, to the last gasp.

"But, Mr. Stokes—" commenced the detective.

"Silence, sir," thundered the first mate.

"But—"

"Another word, and I'll put you in irons."

At this moment Bert Murray created a diversion by suddenly stooping, butting Mr. Stokes in the stomach with his head and darting up the ladder to the main deck, in the open air.

Wilfred Stokes, who had been thrown down by this unexpected attack, quickly recovered himself, and seizing Bob Burleigh by the wrist, dragged him toward the ladder leading to the main deck, the detective not deeming it well to resist at this time, but making up his mind to return and rescue the prisoners below at the first opportunity.

Up to the upper deck went Stokes and the detective, both looking eagerly about for the boy.

"Where is he?" asked Stokes, breathlessly, of a sailor who lounged against the foremast, with his eyes fixed on the lights of the Russian cruiser.

"Who, sir?" responded the seaman, straightening up at once in the presence of the first mate.

"The boy."

"I don't know, sir. I see a kid come up the ladder a minute ago, but he was gone before I had time to look at him."

"Confound him!" muttered Stokes. "I feel as if the *Americus* had a nest of hornets aboard. I wish the captain had let them search the hold without any trouble, and then got rid of them. I don't believe they would have wanted to capture the *Americus* if something had not been done to stir them up."

It was easy to see that Mr. Stokes was very much disturbed over the escape of the boy, and that he did not relish the care of Captain Nicoleff and his seamen. As to Pauline and Marie Novritch he supposed they were still in the Black Bear's own cabin. Their incarceration in the hold was a matter between Clarence Wrench and his precious lieutenant, Pietro.

The detective stood by the first mate's side, debating within himself whether he should take the latter into his confidence, and ask his assistance in saving the two ladies and obtaining control of the *Americus*. Another look into Wilfred Stokes's face decided him against such a proceeding.

"It would not do," he told himself. "I should only find myself in irons for inciting to mutiny,

and, for anything I know, be hung on ship-board off-hand. Certainly it would be made warm for Mr. Stokes, as well as Captain Wrench, afterward, when my father heard of it, but that would be poor consolation for me in my last moments. No, I must do what I have before me single-handed and alone, unless I can find Bert. Where did the boy go, I wonder? He would be a valuable acquisition to the Secret Service. He's as quick as lightning and as brave as—as—well, as an American boy usually is. That is the best I can say for him."

During the detective's reflections, Wilfred Stokes had not been idle. He had set all the men on watch searching for Bert. Every hatchway had been watched, and he knew that the boy had not gone below. He must be either on the upper deck or in the rigging.

It would not do to allow him to remain at large. The Black Bear would listen to no excuses if his prisoners were not kept safely during his absence.

By this time the two boats had nearly reached the Volga, but, as the reader knows, there was no disturbance of any kind, and Stokes could only suppose that the Black Bear's expedition was progressing smoothly and successfully.

"Mr. Burleigh, will you promise, on your honor, not to go below except with my permission?" he asked, suddenly facing about, and locking steadily into the detective's eyes.

"I will."

"Enough! I never knew you to break your word."

"I will not break it now. Where do you suppose that boy is, and what do you mean to do with him—when you catch him?"

"Put him below again. Darn his picture, I ought to give him a taste of the rope's-end, too. He's too slick for a Russian, it seems to me."

The detective smiled. The boy's nationality had almost revealed itself to the first mate already.

A thorough search of the deck by Wilfred Stokes and four of the watch convinced the first mate that Bert must be somewhere aloft.

"We must chase him among the ropes," he said, savagely. "Bill, come up the fore-rigging, and you other three climb into the maintop. He's somewhere up there."

Springing upon the ratlines of the foremast on the starboard, the first mate's assistant, whom he had called Bill, took the other side.

It had been getting warmer for the last twelve hours, the ice-floe having disappeared entirely to the north, and the rigging was as soft to the touch almost as if the *Americus* were sailing in the temperate zone.

Up into the top ran the first mate. He asked the "lookout" if he had seen the boy, but that astute individual, as he turned his plug of tobacco in his mouth, had been watching the lights of the Volga, and had not bestowed any attention upon what had been taking place under his nose.

He was still talking to the "lookout" when a shout from Bill above him made him start.

At the same instant a dark body shot by him, sliding down a rope.

Then there was a splash in the sea, and at the same time arose that cry which is always so dreadful under whatever circumstances it is heard:

"Man overboard!"

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE ESQUIMAUX'S HUT.

"CALL all hands!" yelled Stokes. "Throw life-preservers and hencoops overboard. Stand by to lower a boat!"

He ran down the rigging as he gave these orders at the top of his voice, and then, after throwing overboard a number of loose articles that might help the person in the water to keep afloat, helped with his own hands to lower one of the heavy boats on the starboard that are always on whaling vessels, ready for immediate use.

When he heard the splash the detective was standing near the foremast, looking over the sea at the dark shape of the Volga, whose lights here and there enabled him to make her out with the more certainty.

He was on the alert, however, for anything on the *Americus* that should indicate the contiguity of the boy, and he felt certain at once that the "man overboard" was none other than Bert Murray.

The boat had hardly touched the water before Bob Burleigh was in it, and seizing a pair of oars, pulled with all his strength toward a spot where something black bobbed up and down with the swell of the waves.

"Hold on, Bert," he shouted. "I'm coming."

"Wal, hurry up," returned a faint voice. "This water is not any too warm, I tell you."

At this hint Bob put a little extra energy into his rowing, and in a very short time had overhauled the

swimmer, who was nearly spent with his exertions in the icy-cold water.

"Easy, Innocent. Don't muss my bangs," exclaimed Bert, as the detective clutched his hair, and tried to haul him into the boat by it.

The detective laughed at the boy's coolness and pluck which nothing could subdue, and leaning over caught him by the right arm and pulled.

"Ah!" shivered Bert, as he dropped into the bottom of the boat and caught his breath. "This is a nice fix for a fellow. In an open boat in the Arctic Ocean, soaked through and not a thing to prevent my freezing to death. Where is the crew of the boat?"

"That's so, by gracious," responded Bob. "I never thought of that. As soon as they set her afloat I dropped into her and rowed after you, without waiting for anybody else. I suppose Stokes will have me punished for stealing a ship's boat next."

As he spoke the detective looked around him. Both the *Americus* and the *Volga* were at least half a mile away, in different directions as he could see by their lights. The *Volga* had kept on her course because the people aboard of her knew no reason for changing it. As for the *Americus*, a sailing vessel is not so easily turned. The work of putting her "in stays," so as to swing her around, takes time, and Bob was seaman enough to know that such a proceeding would be useless on such a dark night, if the idea were to find the boat and the boy who was struggling in the water.

"We are not far from the coast, Bert. I guess we had better try and make the shore till morning."

"No," answered the boy resolutely. "There's treachery aboard the *Volga*, and I am an officer of that ship. I'm going there to take a hand in it if I am shot as soon as I get alongside."

"You're right," agreed the detective. "The *Black Bear* is up to some dirty work there, and it is my business to pull him up short. He knows me for his enemy now, and it will be a square, straight-out fight."

Bert crawled over an intervening seat and shook hands with the detective.

"Innocent, you're a white man," he remarked, simply, but heartily.

"Good Heaven, boy, how cold you are! Get right out of these wet clothes," commanded the detective, as he realized the plight of his young companion.

"That's good advice, Innocent. But I can't sit in an open boat with nothing on, and the temperature not more than 32 degrees. What are you giving us?"

The detective had already pulled off his deerskin overcoat when he chanced to think of the locker in the stern of the boat. It was locked, but with his heavy jack-knife and some skill, he had forced the lock in a jiffy, and thrown up the lid with an exultant cry.

"Here is just what we want!" he exclaimed.

Diving into the locker, he pulled out a complete suit of clothes of deerskin, with sealskin cap. In the northern seas, men learn to have extra clothing ready at all times, and Bob knew that there was just such a locker as this, containing similar supplies, in every boat belonging to the *Americus*. Captain Wrench might be a scoundrel, but he understood his ostensible business, as captain of a whaler.

"What kind of togs are they?" asked Bert curiously, as he turned the clothes over and tried to examine them by the faint light of a few stars that had just shown themselves, preparatory to the grand celestial illumination that they would afford later in the night.

"Never mind what kind they are. Put them on. I guess they are pretty clean, even if they are not as showy as your Russian uniform. And—by gracious! This is good! Here is a bottle of brandy, for medicinal use only. Well, we will use it in that way, for I am sure that any physician would prescribe it for you now."

He uncorked the flask by unscrewing its metal top, and offered it to the boy.

"No, thanks, Innocent. It is very kind of you. But I never touch anything of that kind. I promised my folks at home in Boston that I wouldn't, and—and—I never deceive my mother."

The detective hastily replaced the cork in the flask and put it back into the locker. He did not say a word in response to the young man's declaration, but Bert understood intuitively that he had somehow risen still higher in the estimation of his friend, Innocent, as he liked to call him.

The boy took the clothes, and, with youthful ingenuity, burrowed under a pile of canvas that was left on the boat to be rigged as sails on a jury-mast in case of necessity. He was thus enabled to keep out of the cold air while undressed. It took him some time to change his clothes under these disadvantageous circumstances, but he did not mind that, and when he finally emerged, rigged out in deerskin, with the sealskin cap pulled over his ears, he grinned with an enjoyment of the humor of the affair that was not in the least dampened by the awkward and perhaps dangerous situation in which he was.

"Cold, Bert?" asked Bob.

"No. Don't you know that sea-water never gives you cold? I'm perfectly comfortable. Now, pull all for the *Volga*. Cheerily, men, cheerily!"

As he spoke, the light-hearted youngster seized a pair of oars in the bow, Bob sitting amidships and pulling stroke, and the two bent to their work in a way that showed they meant business.

For an hour they worked at the oars without speaking. They needed all their breath for their labor. Then the detective, turning around, looked long and searchingly across the tumbling waves. The stars had come out in millions, and it was considerably lighter than it had been earlier in the night.

"Bert!"

"Halloa!"

"I'm afraid we have lost her."

"Who?"

"The *Volga*."

"What are you giving us, Innocent? There she is, about a mile away."

"And she was only half a mile when we started to row toward her. We are making good time, ain't we?"

"Well, she has steam."

"Certainly! And she has used it so effectively that she has shown a clean pair of heels to us. You cannot see the *Volga*, my boy."

"Yes, I can. See that light about two points to starboard?"

"Yes."

"That's on the *Volga's* jibboom. I can swear to it."

"Well, don't do so, or you'll commit perjury. That's nothing but a star. You see, it is right in the midst of a cluster."

"I know that. But I tell you it is a light on the Russian cruiser, *Volga*, Captain Nicoleff commanding. I'll stake my reputation as a naval officer on it. Pull all!"

As if this ended the discussion, Bert lay to the oars, and the detective, not caring to argue the matter longer just then, pulled away contentedly in the direction of the light or star, whichever it might be.

"Say, Innocent," broke forth the boy, again, after two minutes' hard work.

"Well."

"I can't see that light now."

"Very likely," was the detective's dry response.

"She's swallowed up in the other stars. How can you expect to single out one in particular among so many?"

Bert was about to make some reply in not very pleasant tones, when something caught his eye that changed the direction of his thoughts.

"See, Innocent! Breakers ahead!"

"So, by gracious!"

A long line of white surf that seemed to have sprung into existence almost by magic, and their subdued roar was plainly audible all at once.

The quick eyes and understanding of both the young men explained this seeming phenomenon at once. They had been pulling along shore—closer a good deal, than they had suspected, for their attention had been directed out to sea—and had been under the lee of a headland which ran out irregularly from the coast. The last ten minutes' work had pulled them clear of it, and the surf they saw was at the extreme end of the cape.

"Pull hard, Bert. We had better run in here till we can see what to do next."

"No, let us double this cape, so that we can have a clear view of the offing."

"All right, Bert. Just as you say."

In a few minutes they were in the breakers. They could have avoided them by pulling further out to sea. But they preferred to risk getting wet rather than spend an hour going around the rough water.

"Now, where are your lights, Bert?" asked Burleigh, laughing, as their heavy boat was tossed about like a cockle-shell in the angry surf.

"Innocent, I believe you are right. I can't see them. The best thing we can do is to go ashore and wait for daylight, if we can find any place to keep out of the weather. We are warm enough now, of course, but we cannot row all night, and I fancy the mercury has dropped again during the last hour, judging by the way the wind stings my ears."

"We'll find some nook, I guess," returned the detective, cheerfully. "We have the boat, anyhow. We can pull her ashore and sleep among the sails as snugly as if we were in our own berths."

"That's what, Innocent. Gosh! What an adventure all this will be to tell the folks when we get back to Boston, eh?"

The boy chuckled as he thought of the way he would open the yarn in the family parlor, with a crowd of admiring listeners around him, including a certain peach-cheeked, cherry-lipped damsel with whom he had broken a gold dollar in two before he left home, and his half of which was even now pressed warmly against his chest just over his heart beneath his rough woolen shirt.

They had pulled over the breakers now, and were inside the line of surf. The white expanse of snow-covered shore stood out ghastly in the starlight and did not offer a very warm welcome to castaways. Moreover, it was Russian soil—the extreme north of Siberia—and to these two young men, who had just been talking and thinking about home, it seemed more than ordinarily cheerless.

Their glance swept the dreary expanse of snow, as they made up their minds to stay in their boat till daylight, when Bert exclaimed:

"No, we won't, either. Look, at the top of that ridge. There is smoke."

"Ah!"

"Smoke means fire. Hurrah! We shall get under cover, after all. There's an Indian hut on the other side, probably half-way down the hill. The *Esquimaux* are all right, and even one of their huts is better than nothing. They won't put us on the oven, perhaps, as they do in some parts of Russia, but they will give us a warm corner by the fire, and with our coats and things around us, we can put in a few hours comfortably and advantageously, I have no doubt."

The boat was soon pulled ashore high and dry, above the reach of the tide, and then the detective went to the locker again, and brought forth a six-shooter, which he handed to the boy, together with a cutlass. The swim indulged in by Bert had rendered his own pistol useless for the present, and his sword he had cast away from him before he climbed

the rigging of the *Americus*, from which he had accidentally fallen into the sea.

The detective armed himself in like manner, and then, when they had seen that their pistols were fully charged and that their side-arms were ready for instant use, they made tracks through the snow for the ridge, above which arose the smoke in increasing volume.

Not a sign of the *Americus* or *Volga* could be discerned now. If they carried lights they were not visible to Bert and the detective, and the latter could only suppose that the vessels had stood further out to sea, or had taken such a course that intervening islands, of which there are many north of Behring's Straits, hid them from the mainland.

"Never mind, Bert. We shall know what to do in the daylight. What we want now is rest and something to eat," observed Bob Burleigh, as they trudged up the incline.

As they had surmised, the smoke did proceed from a hole in the roof of a rude hut of sods, stone and hard-caked turf, such as the *Esquimaux* hide in in the summer months. It was just below the top of the hill, where it was well protected from the sea-winds, while enabling the inmates to get a good view of the ocean without going far from the house.

The two young men went unhesitatingly to the heavy wooden door and knocked for admittance.

There was the noise of bustle inside, and after a minute's pause the door was flung open, and they had a full view of the interior, made ruddy by the light of two large pine torches stuck in the floor.

Together the two young men exclaimed, as they looked into the faces of three persons who stood by the side of the crackling wood fire:

"Good heavens!"

Then they rushed forward, and exchanged hearty handshakes with Pauline and Marie Novritch and Captain Nicoleff.

CHAPTER X.

MUTINY.

WHEN the *Black Bear*, with Pietro's aid, had overcome the young second officer of the *Volga*, and made him prisoner in the captain's cabin, he turned his attention to the work he had ordered the first officer to do.

With Pietro at his heels he examined the whole upper deck minutely. He had put one of his own men at the helm, with orders to stand out to the north further away from shore. He had no wish to be in full view of the land at daybreak. He was playing a desperate game, and he knew that it required delicate manipulation if it was to be successful.

"Where is that sneaking Russian?" growled the *Black Bear*, as he saw that all the hatches were battened down, and that, with the exception of the lookout in the foretop, all the *Volga's* crew were below.

"Meaning the first officer," suggested Pietro, with a flabby grin.

"Yes."

Bang, went a pistol near them, and a bullet whizzed past the captain's head.

"There he is," chuckled the dwarf. He did not seem to mind discomfort or danger to himself so long as Clarence Wrench shared it.

With a flash, the *Black Bear's* cutlass leaped from its scabbard, as the captain dashed forward into the darkness in the direction from which the shot had come.

In vain he searched, boiling with rage, the whole forepart of the steamer. Not a vestige of human being could he find, while the mocking laughter of Pietro sounded in his ears, and kept his anger at full pitch.

"No use, Cap. He's safe somewhere. He knows the ship better than you do, and you might chase him from now to daylight without getting your hands on him."

The *Black Bear* was fain to acknowledge the truth of this observation, notwithstanding the offensive way in which it was put. He had enough of his own men to work the ship, provided he could keep the engineers to their duty.

"I wonder if those fellows below suspect the state of things on deck," he muttered. "I'll go down and see."

"By yourself?" asked the dwarf, who, although he had not been addressed, had listened to the captain's remarks, and had no misgivings about responding.

The *Black Bear* scowled.

"No. You shall go with me. Then, perhaps if they are inclined to be ugly they may cut your throat."

"Thank you kindly, captain."

Pietro's feelings were not easily hurt, and he grinned cadaverously at the *Black Bear's* kindly suggestion.

"See that the hatches are really fastened," commanded Wrench, in his off-hand manner.

The dwarf obeyed, and after a few minutes' absence, came back with the information that the forecabin had been left unfastened, and that there were a dozen of the *Volga's* crew inside, discussing the situation. They had an idea that something was wrong, and the next thing to look for was mutiny.

All this Pietro told in his usual cheerful way, his flabby face becoming flabbier than ever in his satisfaction at being the bearer of evil news to Clarence Wrench.

"Sacré! I'll see," growled the *Black Bear*.

"Pietro!"

"Yes."

"We must settle with those fellows at once."

"Certainly."

Without hesitation the Black Bear marched toward the fore-castle.

"Want me to come with you, Cap?" asked Pietro. "Yes, and at the first sign of ugliness on the part of any one, send a bullet through his head!"

"All right. But if I carry out your orders strictly, I know I shall have to begin with you."

The Black Bear raised his hand threateningly, and Pietro dodged away.

In the fore-castle, sitting on lockers and standing about the narrow space were, as the dwarf had said, some dozen or so of Russian sailors, scowling in the light of the oil lamp that hung from the ceiling, and fingering the knives that were stuck in their belts in anything but a reassuring way.

The Black Bear, however, was not a man to be affected by surly looks from common seamen. As he would say himself, he understood them, and he never met a set of men yet whom he could not control.

He addressed them in their own language, as they tendered him an evidently unwilling salute. They were men-of-war's men, and had been trained to the most exact discipline. The Russian navy is one of the best in the world in this respect.

"Men," he commenced, "Captain Nicoleff has taken possession of the whaling vessel, Americus, to make her captain answer certain charges brought against him by the Russian Government. As you can see and hear from my accent, I am a subject of the Czar."

"What infernal cheek he has," muttered Pietro, under his breath.

"I was on board the Americus as a passenger, having nothing to do with the vessel," continued the Black Bear. "When Captain Nicoleff came aboard and found himself compelled to assume command of the vessel, he was in a quandary as to how he was to convey the information to his own ship. I relieved him of the difficulty by offering my services. I am an officer in the Russian Navy, having been to America on a furlough. Now, men, at Captain Nicoleff's request I shall assist your first officer in the command of the Volga."

The men had been listening intently to this harangue, delivered fluently in their own tongue, and with an air of truth calculated to allay all suspicion. As the Black Bear reached the last sentence, however, there was some muttering, and one burly fellow, with a large, round face, almost hidden by black whiskers, half-turning to the others, was evidently about to express doubts as to the truth of Clarence Wrench's words.

The Black Bear, quick as lightning, saw this and acted immediately.

With one blow of his ponderous fist he sent the malcontent reeling among his fellows.

"Seize that man and put him in irons. Now! At once!"

The Black Bear thundered this order in the manner of one born to command.

There was a few seconds' hesitation, and then the Russian sailors, quailing beneath the glance of his fiery black eyes, laid hands upon the black-whiskered man, and placing heavy handcuffs upon his wrists, led him below to a corner of the gun-deck fenced off with thick iron bars for use as a prison. The remainder of the sailors stood where they were, afraid to move until ordered to do so by their new commander.

Wrench, after scanning the faces of each of the eight men—three having gone below with the prisoner—was apparently satisfied.

"So," he said to himself. "That is the way to keep down such fellows. I think it will be safe for me to leave them for a few moments now. I have it all my own way as sure as my name is Clarence Wrench."

Pietro did not say anything. He was, for once, completely silenced by the display of nerve on the part of his captain.

"Hello, Pietro!"

It was the voice of Silas Hawkins.

"Here, Silas," answered Captain Wrench. He was glad to have the long-headed Yankee boatswain at his elbow again.

"Captain, I have my men aboard, ready for orders. Where shall I stow 'em?"

"Set the watch on deck. Send a man up to relieve the lookout, and let two come down here."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The Black Bear added in a low tone:

"Let the two men keep a close watch on these fellows. At the first sign of mutiny, no matter how slight, let me know. Do you understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Good! I hold you responsible."

And with this the Black Bear, Pietro at his heels, went down into the engine-room. Here he contented himself with looking down into the fiery pit where the engineer and his three assistants were at work. He saw that they had no suspicion of the change in the command of the cruiser, being occupied solely with their own duties.

They did not particularly notice Clarence Wrench and the dwarf in the semi-darkness, and the former, with the reflection that he had only to signal them from above, without their knowing anything about the change of captains, walked away again, and appeared on the upper deck.

The Black Bear felt now that he was in full possession of the Volga. He had all the crew either as prisoners or at his disposal, and he could do as he pleased with the cruiser.

He saw that his orders had been obeyed, and that his own men were at all the important posts. Then he examined the armament of the vessel. A long brass gun, forward, was mounted so that it could be swung around in any direction. It was a bow-chaser of the most approved pattern.

"Pietro, how many guns are there on the main deck?"

"Eight—four on a side, and trained ready for action at any moment."

"Good! I don't want to use them. But it is as well to know that we have them handy. If those Russian fellows refuse to work them, why, I can handle one, you another, and Silas another. That will be enough to give them a broadside."

"Then? Who do you mean by them?"

"Who? Why, any one," answered the Black Bear, somewhat confusedly.

"Do you mean the Americans?" whispered the dwarf, with a grin.

"Perhaps."

"Ah!"

It was now starlight, and the Volga, under more steam, by Captain Wrench's orders, communicated to the engine room by a bell, was bounding merrily along at a sufficient distance from the shore to be out of sight. She had rounded East Cape, passed Wrangel Island, and was now, as the Black Bear judged, some three or four miles from the Americas.

"So, Nicoleff Novritch, I think I have shown you that you cannot defy the Black Bear. And you, Bob Burleigh!"

He clinched his fists as he thought of the way the detective had managed to hoodwink him for a whole voyage.

He walked up and down the bridge, where he had installed himself as captain of the Volga, and turned over his plans in his mind. The knowledge that the first officer was in hiding somewhere did not disturb him. He would have to reveal himself at some time. In the mean time he could not do much harm.

He was thus reflecting when a pair of strong arms were thrown around his neck from behind, and a voice in Russian hissed in his ear:

"You scoundrel, I have you now!"

At the same time, a foot was thrust behind his heels, and the Black Bear was lying on his back, with the Russian first officer's knee in his chest.

As Clarence Wrench recognized the face of his assailant, a contemptuous sneer curled his lip. There were few men who could resist the gigantic strength of the Black Bear. Taken by surprise, he had been forced back; but now, summoning all the agility and power at his command, he turned over and had the other by the throat, completely at his mercy.

The Black Bear did not say a word; but he had decided coolly that he would kill this troublesome Muscovite.

Holding him down with his left hand, he felt in his pocket inside his coat for a knife. He had just seized the handle, and the poor Russian was about to be speeded out of the world, when a heavy blow from a marlinespike laid Clarence Wrench senseless.

Then there was a shout, and the black-whiskered seaman who had been placed in irons, flourished the heavy bar that had laid the captain low, and cheered on half a dozen Russian seamen to the attack.

The Russian officer was not slow to rise to his feet. Now was the time to regain possession of the Volga, and punish this impudent pirate.

"Seize them all and put them below," he commanded, in Russian.

The black-whiskered man, who was, in fact, the boatswain, gave the unconscious form of Clarence Wrench a hearty kick, and ran down the ladder to the bridge.

It was his last action in this world. A pistol banged, and he fell, shot through the head.

Pietro, with his smoking pistol still in his hand, dashed up the stairway, followed by Silas Hawkins and the twelve American seamen.

There was a short, sharp struggle, and then the first officer, who had made such a gallant fight, together with the six members of the Volga's crew who had followed the black-whiskered boatswain, were heavily ironed and stowed in the hold of the vessel, where the steady "thump-thump" of the engines seemed to be singing to them the death-knell or all their earthly hopes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET TREASURE.

PIETRO looked at the Black Bear, as he lay unconscious on the bridge, and could hardly restrain himself from following the black-whiskered seaman's example and giving him a hearty kick.

"I'd like to, curse you!" he muttered, "but I guess I had better not now. But I'll get even with you somehow, if it is only to see you hanged in Frisco."

There was no mistake about the malevolence with which the misshapen little wretch uttered these words, but he saw that Silas Hawkins was approaching with two of his men to raise the captain, and he knew that the Yankee harpooner had the unquestioning reverence for the "skipper" characteristic of all old sailors.

Taken to the cabin, the Black Bear was soon restored to consciousness, but the blow on his head still made itself felt by a certain dizziness and inability to collect his thoughts.

He looked inquiringly at Silas Hawkins, who, with Pietro, had been bathing his forehead and pouring brandy, that they had found in Captain Nicoleff's private stores, down his throat.

"All right, sir. You had a nasty crack, but you will get over it in a few minutes. That black-whiskered chap allowed as he'd kill yeou, I guess, but, j-whillikens, if he ain't dead himself, then I never see a corpse."

Silas grinned approvingly as he said this, and nodded toward Pietro. He did not like the dwarf as

a general thing, but he felt that credit should be given where it was due, regardless of his own personal preferences or prejudices.

"Where—are—?" faltered Wrench.

"Meaning them two fellers ez we had down here on the floor," suggested Silas. "Wa-al, they are down below with the rest. Pietro tended to that."

"Yes; they were neither use nor ornament here," put in the dwarf.

"That's right. Silas, go on deck and watch things a few minutes. Signal the engineer to stop, and just lay to where we are for the present. I want to speak to Pietro. You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Silas, as he disappeared up the companionway.

"Pietro, you'll have to take command for a few hours. I'm hurt more than I thought at first. Perhaps, if I sleep awhile, I shall be well again. As it is now, I am not in good enough shape to manage things. You know what to do. I—"

The Black Bear fell back upon the bed, and closed his eyes.

The dwarf bent over him eagerly, and a shade of disappointment crossed his flabby face as the captain looked up and said:

"I am all right, Pietro. Only sleepy. That's all."

With these words he closed his eyes again, and Pietro, stealthily shaking his fist at him, went out of the cabin to the upper deck.

"Now, brother Wrench, I have the chance I've been waiting for," he muttered. "Piracy is a rather serious thing and if stealing a Russian Government steamer isn't piracy, I should like to know what is."

The first streaks of dawn were visible in the eastern sky, and Pietro reckoned that daylight would not be long in enabling him to see just where the Volga had got to.

"Silas, can you see anything of the Americus? The captain says we are to overhaul her as soon as possible. Then we are to go straight to Texas with our prize and turn it over to the authorities. I am afraid it won't be very healthy for any of us when this business comes to be inquired into."

"Why not? An American vessel has a right to defend herself against a foreigner who attempts to capture her, and that's just what the Volga tried to do. Captain Wrench was a little too slick for her, though."

The dwarf chuckled softly to himself, and with the aid of a night glass that he had brought from below, scanned the horizon in every direction.

In a few minutes he discovered the Americus off East Cape, and evidently anchored there.

Without hesitation he went to the helmsman, and taking the wheel in his own hands, bore straight down upon the whaler.

It was rapidly getting light when the Volga ran in between the shore and the Americus and stopped. Pietro could see the men moving about on the whaler, as if uncertain what to do.

"Give them a signal, Silas," he said. "Run up the flag."

At the word, Silas Hawkins, who had been preparing for such an order, hauled down the Russian Eagle from the main peak, and replaced it with the Stars and Stripes.

"Now lower a boat and come with me."

Half an hour later Pietro, Silas and eight of the American seamen climbed up the side of the Americus and faced Wilfred Stokes.

"Prisoners all right, Mr. Stokes?" asked the dwarf.

"Where is Captain Wrench?" was Stokes's response.

"On board the prize, the Volga."

"What are his orders?"

"He wants to know, first, whether you have Captain Nicoleff and his men safe, as he left them?"

"No."

Wilfred Stokes uttered this monosyllable with what, to Pietro, sound d like a note of defiance.

"Where are they?"

"Ashore, within a mile or two of us, for all I know. I went below to see that they were safe, after the escape of the midshipman—"

"He escaped, did he?"

"Yes, and Bob Burleigh took one of the boats of the Americus and went with him."

"That's a pretty story."

"It's a true one," answered Stokes, sternly.

"Go on."

I went down into the hold, and I there found two ladies—those that we picked up in the Straits yesterday, confined as prisoners, with Captain Nicoleff, of the Volga."

"Well?"

"The captain showed me that the Americus was engaged in illegal traffic, and proved to me, by his official papers, that his business on board this ship was to seize contraband articles in the name of the Russian Government."

"Well?"

"He called upon me, as an honest man, to release him from the hold of the Americus, and put him ashore on Russian soil, where he could take measures to recover his ship, of which Captain Clarence Wrench had taken possession."

Pietro tried to grin in his usual careless fashion, but his rage would not allow his flabby face to be twisted into more than the most distant resemblance of mirth.

"And you let him go?"

"I did. I put them ashore at once, Captain Nicoleff saying that he knew where he could obtain shelter for the night, and that he would be active in the morning."

"Well, you will answer to Captain Wrench for it."

"I am ready to do so, but I think he will have

enough to do to answer for himself," answered Stokes.

"Mutiny, eh?"

"Under some circumstances mutiny is the only course for an honest man," returned the first mate, as he turned his back upon the dwarf and walked aft.

"Silas, seize that man, in the captain's name," suddenly yelled Pietro, foaming with rage.

The boatswain hesitated, and on the instant Wilfred Stokes turned, with a revolver in each hand.

"I'll kill the first man that advances one step," he shouted. "As first mate of the *Americus*, I am the captain here now!"

"Ay, ay! Mr. Stokes is right," broke forth several gruff voices, and all the seamen on deck, with the exception of two, ranged themselves behind the first mate, looking threateningly at the dwarf.

"Pietro, I think you had better get out o' sight," suggested Hawkins, "and let Mr. Stokes run things till the captain comes aboard. I don't exactly understand what kind of a snarl we're in here, but cussarn me if I ever see such goings on in a whaling cruise afore, an' I've been in the business, man an' boy, for nigh on to fifty years."

The dwarf looked around him, but on every side he saw stern faces, in which there was no indication of friendliness to himself.

"You will be brought to your senses before you're many hours older," he growled, as he obeyed the implied command, and walked toward the companionway.

He had scarcely turned his head, when there was a confusion of shouts in Russian and English, and a dozen of the *Volga's* crew climbed up the ladder by which he and Hawkins had reached the deck, and threw themselves upon the sailors who sprung to the defense.

The *Americus* people, though taken by surprise, were, fortunately, armed with cutlasses and pistols.

Stokes fired both his pistols at once. The first officer of the *Volga*, who led the boarders, was standing in the chains. At the report he threw up both hands and fell back into the sea, shot through the heart. One of his followers shared a similar fate.

Then it was cut and slash, hand to hand, with cutlasses, and the *Americus* crew were victorious.

With the exception of the two victims to Stokes's pistols, there were no deaths, but there were plenty of wounded to claim the attention of such of the crew who were experienced enough in rude surgery to bind up the cuts and stabs that constituted the hurts. In this work Pietro was particularly useful, he having, in fact, studied medicine, though he had never taken a diploma.

"What does that mean, Silas?" asked Stokes, when the wounded had been taken below, while four unhurt Russian seamen, who had surrendered as prisoners, were in the same unpleasant quarters in the hold lately tenanted by Nicoleff and the two ladies.

"It means that Pietro deserted his post on board the steamer, leaving a foremast man temporarily in command, because he did not expect to be away more than half an hour. The natural result was that when there was no one to watch things, there was a monkey-shine, and that Russian officer thought he would try and rescue his captain."

"I guess you're right."

"I know I'm right. Now I think we had better get aboard the *Volga* as soon as we can, and look after our captain."

"First of all, I am going to make sure of Pietro," observed Stokes, as he went down to the cabin, whither the dwarf had retired.

"Pietro," he called, as he went through the doorway.

There was no answer, and he went to the other door behind the curtain. It was locked.

"He must have gone through here and locked it after him. He's up to some deviltry, I suppose. But I will find out what it is this time, if it takes me all day," muttered Stokes.

As he spoke, his foot caught in the carpet that was rumpled near the leg of the table upon which he leaned.

To pull up the carpet was the work of an instant. Then his fingers closed around an iron ring, and he pulled it up with a small section of flooring.

As he expected, there was a secret place below, with a ladder leading into the darkness.

He put his foot on the ladder, but managed, somehow, to slip. To his surprise, he fell only a few feet, the ladder having just three steps, though in the darkness he had imagined it led into a deep pit.

He saw in the distance the feeble glimmer of an oil lamp, and crawling along in a narrow space, only about three feet in height, he saw the figure of a man, with its back toward him, taking something out of a small chest.

One glance at the squat figure, with the big, touselled head convinced him that it was none other than Pietro.

Cautiously Stokes crept forward, until he could look over the dwarf's shoulder. Then he saw that the chest contained diamonds and melted gold that, even to his unpracticed eye, showed that they were worth many thousands of dollars.

CHAPTER XII.

PIETRO TAKES CARE OF HIMSELF.

For a moment Stokes looked upon the jewels in utter astonishment. Then he became more interested in the maneuvers of Pietro.

The dwarf was carefully fishing out the diamonds

from the other valuables, and was stowing them in a leather money-belt, with numerous pockets, that he wore under his clothing, next his skin.

"Hold on there!" yelled Stokes, grasping Pietro's right hand, just as it was withdrawn from the chest holding a very large gem, that flashed in the light of the lamp like liquid fire.

The dwarf turned like lightning and closed with his disturber.

There was so little room that the movements of both men were impeded, but the dwarf, being so much the smaller, had, in this case, a decided advantage over his adversary.

Pietro had been kneeling at the chest, but when interrupted by Stokes he had dropped into a sitting posture, with the other leaning forward upon his shoulder. He still held the large diamond firmly in his clutch.

"You little wretch! I always suspected that you had some business on hand that would not stand the light of day. I recognize some of this property from the description I read of it in San Francisco papers."

"Oh, you did, eh? Smart, ain't you?" snarled the dwarf, as he twisted himself so as to force Stokes against the chest, with the back of his neck pressed down upon the edge.

Wilfred Stokes was so firmly wedged in that he was helpless; but he knew that Pietro could not hold him in that position for long, so he did not fear him particularly. In an open space he would have been much more than a match for the dwarf.

"Pietro, I shall have you turned over to the police as soon as we get into an American port."

"Yes, when we get to one."

"We shall get to one soon. Rest assured of that," retorted Stokes.

As he spoke he suddenly made a desperate movement to release himself from the dwarf's grasp, and succeeded. Then, without trying to bring the dwarf with him, he backed rapidly out of the little nook, and, stepping out into the cabin, closed down the trap, and shot a bolt that was fitted on the outside, sunk in the wood so that it would not make itself felt under the carpet. Then he replaced the carpet and went on deck.

Meanwhile, Pietro sat in front of his chest, grinning in his impish way, and examining, with his one eye, the diamond that he still held in his right hand.

"Ah, you beauty!" he said. "And there are a dozen more like you. Well, you are all mine now. Our precious captain has run to the end of his string, and poor Pietro, who knows enough about him to hang him two or three times over, will get his rights at last."

He hastily took the rest of the diamonds from the chest and finished his task of bestowing them in the money-belt.

"There are—\$50,000. Enough to make Pietro comfortable for the rest of his life, even if he had not already a comfortable little sum in bank in Madrid. Ah! Once I get back to Spain, I'll never trouble 'Frisco again. As for the Black Bear! Well, I must take care that he never has the ability to bother me any more."

He shut down the chest, locked it, and hid the key under a pile of dust that seemed to have accumulated accidentally in a corner, but that really was put there on purpose to conceal a small hole into which the key slipped.

"Now, good-by, old friend! I hope you will treat the Black Bear as well as you have me, if he ever visits you again. Ha, ha! If he ever does. Which I take the liberty to doubt."

He edged away from the chest and got to the short ladder under the trap. He raised himself so that he could push with all his force against the trap-door. It was immovable.

This circumstance did not disturb Pietro in the least. He laughed gleefully, and then, with a side-long blow of his fist, knocked the ladder down. The action disturbed the flooring upon which he sat and revealed a loose board.

The dwarf knew all about the construction of this hiding-place. He laughed at the idea of Wilfred Stokes making him a prisoner by fastening the trap-door over his head.

"If my honest friend had been in the same business as Captain Wrench and Pietro, he would have known that rats always have more than one entrance to their holes. Mighty smart man, Stokes. He'd be a little too smart to live, I'm afraid, if I hadn't made up my mind to quit the *Americus* right away. I've seen men die only because they happened to find out more than was good for them to know."

As he reflected he lifted up a similar trap to that above, and the next moment stood among a number of barrels on the lower deck that prevented easy access to the vicinity of the entrance to the secret recess.

He closed the trap carefully, and then made his way cautiously through the labyrinth of barrels (a pathway having been carefully arranged that was easy enough to be followed by one in the secret) until he reached the forward deck and from thence the fore-castle.

It was now broad daylight. A short distance away, near the shore, the *Volga* rode at anchor, a thin ribbon of smoke rising from her smoke-stack, her sails furled, the Stars and Stripes floating from her main gaff, and her brass-work shining in the morning sun like burnished gold. She was, indeed, a beautiful sight, or would have been did she not represent so much worry and apprehension to everybody on board the *Americus*.

The dwarf looked cautiously around, but neither Silas or Stokes were to be seen. The truth was they had both turned in for an hour or two, the first mate leaving strict orders that he should be called at the

first suspicious movement on the part of the *Volga* or any one aboard of her.

Pietro's performance below had not been mentioned by Stokes to anybody. He was not a talkative man at any time, and in the present case considered that it was particularly desirable to keep his own counsel.

So when the dwarf swaggered on deck, the men on watch took no particular notice of him beyond recognizing him as an officer without any well-defined rank save that, after Captain Wrench, his word was generally regarded as law.

Pietro, with his usual carelessness of what might be the thought of anybody near him, took a long, careful survey of the coast.

In the distance he saw a blue wreath of smoke arising above a ridge some quarter of a mile from the shore line. As we already know, the smoke came from the top of an Esquimaux hut in which several of our friends had taken shelter.

"Suppose there are Indians in the neighborhood," muttered the dwarf. "Wonder whether it would not be a good move to hunt them up and get them to help me get through to Yakutsk. From there I could easily make my way to St. Petersburg, and from thence to Spain."

He bit his stubby finger-nails as he thus reflected, and as he did so they seemed to turn his thoughts in other directions.

"No, that would not do," he hissed. "I have a score to wipe out with the Black Bear before I settle down to enjoy a quiet life. I'll wait."

The boat in which the *Volga's* men had made their attack upon the *Americus* still floated idly by the side of the whaler, just where it had been secured when its crew made their futile attempt to overcome Stokes and his men.

"The very thing," said Pietro, with a grin. "I'll go and see how our friend, Clarence Wrench, is getting along. It is not very safe to stay here, under the very noses of the Czar's people with a Government steamer that has been taken by main strength. I don't want to be hung for piracy."

Without more ado he let himself down into the boat, and seizing a pair of oars, put all his extraordinary strength into his work, and rowed swiftly toward the *Volga*.

"Halloa, there! Come back!" yelled Wilfred Stokes, as he saw, when too late, that his supposed captive was not only free, but was rowing toward the enemy, with what purpose he knew not.

The dwarf emitted a harsh "Ha, ha, ha!" and ceased rowing for an instant to wave his hand mockingly at the *Americus*.

Bang!

Wilfred Stokes fired his pistol at the little imp but the bullet fell short, and Pietro's laughter redoubled as he bent to his oars again and made his boat cleave through the water with as much power as if there had been eight rowing instead of one, and an undersized man at that.

As the dwarf neared the *Volga* he could not see a single person, either in the rigging or on deck. The bridge, too, where the officer of the watch should have been, was deserted, and the ship might, for anything that he could see, be entirely abandoned.

He rowed boldly up to it, however, and seizing the rope-ladder that still hung from the main-chains, climbed into the steamer.

"This is funny!" he croaked. "There must be some one aboard. That fool of an officer, who met his fate on the *Americus*, would hardly leave things unprotected here if he had managed to get the better of the Black Bear."

He looked up and down, but not a soul could be seen.

"Well, I must find out something," he continued. "Clarence Wrench may be able to explain this peculiar arrangement."

"Well, Pietro," said a sleepy voice, as he entered the cabin. "Where have you been?"

The Black Bear was sitting up in his bunk, looking rather wildly at the dwarf. The blow on the head had left him somewhat dazed even now.

"Crazy, by gracious!" muttered the dwarf.

"What's that?" suddenly shouted the Black Bear, as his eyes blazed with fury.

He sprung from the bunk as he spoke, and it was well for Pietro that the captain of the *Americus* had no weapon at his hand.

"Nothing, nothing!" answered the dwarf, hastily. Courageous as the little man was, he did not want to be forced into a hand-to-hand combat with the Black Bear.

"You lie!" shouted Clarence Wrench.

Pietro dashed toward the companionway, but the other was too quick for him. He reached the foot of the stairs first.

There was no doubt about the mania of this dark-visaged man, who, with his black eyes transfixing the dwarf, looked like an avenging demon, eager for his prey. He was stark mad.

"You lie!" he repeated, as, with Herculean strength, he wrenched one of the brass hand-rails from the stairway and rushed upon the dwarf.

The latter did not wait to argue matters. He saw the brass bar flash as Wrench tried to whirl it around his head, but struck the ceiling of the cabin and thus lost the power of the intended blow.

This accidental turning aside of the stroke probably saved Pietro's life. Thick and hard as the dwarf's head was, if the twenty pounds or so of brass had descended upon it with the viciousness intended by the Black Bear, there is reason to suppose that it would have cracked like a walnut-shell.

Before Wrench could raise his weapon to deal another blow, Pietro had vanished through the door opposite the companionway and shutting it with a bang, locked and bolted it.

He did not look where he was going, but ran for-

ward headlong, intending to reach the upper deck by the first ladder he came to, and thence make his way to his boat and away.

He saw that it would be useless to try and talk to Clarence Wrench now, and that the best thing for him to do would be to get ashore, and escape with the wealth he had before Captain Nicoleff returned, with reinforcements, to make every one concerned in his imprisonment and the capture of the Volga, suffer.

"Hold there!"

The words were in Russian, but Pietro understood them perfectly. He thought it would be the better policy, however, to pretend ignorance, so he did not stop in his run along the gun deck toward an open hatchway that he could see in the distance.

"Hold!"

The command rung out again, and this time was emphasized by a hand being laid with no gentle touch upon the dwarf's shoulder, with the result that the little man was dragged back so suddenly that he tripped and fell flat upon his back.

With an oath, he was on his feet again, and seized the person who had stopped him.

Then, he suddenly changed his mind, and allowing his great flabby face to relax into a smile, said in Spanish: "At your service, sir."

"Exactly; as my prisoner," was the response in the same language.

In five minutes the dwarf was chained to the nearest gun-carriage, with the young second officer of the Volga—whom we last saw himself prisoner, after his gallant fight with the Black Bear—searching his pockets and clothing for weapons.

The dwarf submitted to this search gently, partly because he could not help it, and partly because he felt that his money-belt with the value of a fortune in it, could not be found, unless he was actually stripped of his clothing.

"Who is in command of this ship?" asked the dwarf, still in Spanish, which was a much easier language to him than Russian, though he spoke the latter fluently.

"I am," announced the young officer, "until Captain Nicoleff returns."

"Where is Captain Nicoleff?"

"He is on shore."

The dwarf started.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"We got a signal from him an hour ago—a private signal of his own."

"Yes?"

"And we shall have him aboard very soon now."

"Ah!"

"And then— Well, the captain will know what to do, I expect," observed the officer, shrugging his shoulders, with a smile, as he turned away from Pietro, having taken from him a six-shooter, cutlass and long dirk-knife.

"But Captain Wrench?" said the dwarf, inquiringly. "What about him?"

"I am going to put him in safety now. He got the better of us while on deck a short time ago, and drove us all below, soon after we sent a party to take possession of the Americus."

"Ah! Yes. That was the party that took our vessel by surprise. I escaped in the middle of the row in the Volga's boat."

"Leaving our people in possession, of course?"

"Of course," acquiesced Pietro, with a sardonic grin, adding, below his breath: "The fool actually does not know that the officer and one of his crew were wounded, and the rest made prisoners. Well, it isn't my business to tell him. I have enough to do to attend to my own affairs."

With which philosophical reflection, Pietro dropped into a sitting posture on the floor and devoted his attention, backed up by considerable mechanical ingenuity, to getting himself free from his gyves.

CHAPTER XIII.

READY FOR A NIGHT ATTACK.

For a moment after Bob Burleigh and Bert Murray had so unexpectedly come face to face with Captain Nicoleff and the wife and daughter of Ivan Novritch in the hut of the Esquimaux, no one spoke.

Then Bert, the irrepressible, whispered to the detective:

"Isn't she a daisy?"

"How did you come here?" asked Nicoleff, still retaining the hand of the detective in his own, in the peculiar grasp that brings the Masonic brotherhood together at once in whatever part of the world its members may meet.

"How did you come here?" returned the detective, with a laugh.

Pauline looked inquiringly at the detective, and then drew Marie gently behind her, for she saw that the young girl was somewhat embarrassed by the open admiration of Bert.

At this moment, a queer figure, not more than four feet in height, with shaggy hair, and a face of kindly expression looking from beneath its sealskin cap, stepped from behind the others and made a motion of welcome to Bob Burleigh and his youthful companion.

"This is Pete. He is a very old friend of mine. This is not the first time I have shared the hospitality of his hut, and I knew exactly where to come when I landed with my sister-in-law and niece."

"Eh?" said the detective.

"Why, Pauline Novritch was my brother's wife, and of course Marie is my niece," explained Nicoleff, with a smile. "Had you forgotten that?"

"Only for an instant. But you have not told me yet how you escaped from the Americus."

In a few words Nicoleff told how Wilfred Stokes had released him, and had put him ashore, with the

two ladies and the four seamen of the Volga. The latter he said, were in another hut, within call of that they were in, owned by Esquimaux Pete.

"By the way, I must thank Pete," said the detective, turning to the Esquimaux, who having seen that all his guests were comfortably seated on rude benches around the fire, now stood outside the circle, beaming benevolently upon all.

"Do it by signs, then, for he is deaf and dumb."

The detective was a good pantomimist, and even had he not been, he could easily have made Pete understand his gratitude for the Esquimaux (or Indian, for both terms are applied to this peculiar race,) was very intelligent, as is often the case with those who have lost one or more of the senses.

The detective told of his adventures with Bert Murray, and how the Black Bear had taken possession of the Volga.

The Russian captain ground his teeth in indignation.

"I will bring that gentleman's career to a close very shortly," he said, in a low, determined tone. "There must be an end to every life of law-breaking."

"I will help you!" declared the detective, as he glanced around, and thought of the web he had been gradually weaving around the Black Bear.

The Esquimaux here brought forward a meal of fish and ship biscuit, which, though coarse fare, was acceptable enough to the detective and Bert Murray. The others had already eaten all they desired.

"I think we had better all try and get some sleep," suggested Bob Burleigh, at length, when he and his companion had done justice to their supper. "I am certain that the Volga is not far away, and—"

"And we will be aboard of her soon after daylight, or I'll know the reason why not," interrupted Nicoleff, sternly. "We can use your boat. That is, if you will let us have it."

The detective smiled grimly.

"The quarrel is as much mine as yours," he said.

"And mine," put in Bert.

Captain Nicoleff looked at the boy sternly. He had not forgotten that Mr. Murray was an officer in the Russian Navy, attached to the steamer Volga, commanded by Captain Nicoleff. Bert recognized the look by saluting his superior officer.

"But I must say that that girl, Marie Novritch, is a daisy," he said to himself under his breath, as he stole a glance at her sidelong.

Bert Murray was an American youth, and he liked the last word as much as he admired a pretty girl.

Pete in the mean time was busy preparing couches for his visitors.

In one corner of the hut, which was fenced off from the rest of the apartment by barrels and boxes that had evidently at some time or other been part of a ship's stores he spread a number of brown skins for Pauline and Marie.

The elder lady inclined her head graciously, as her host, pointing to the corner, made signs that the bed, such as it was, awaited her pleasure. Then, taking her daughter by the hand, she clasped those of each of her companions in turn, expressing, in this simple fashion, her gratitude to them all.

Marie followed her example shyly. When she came to Bert, that young gentleman would like to have held the dainty fingers in his strong clasp for the rest of the night, and it was with a sigh that he could not repress that he relinquished it in conventional style, saying in Spanish, as being more romantic than English:

"Adios, senorita!"

"Adios!" she replied softly, as she turned her gray eyes for a second upon the boy's face.

The blood rushed quickly to his cheeks, and for ten minutes after the ladies had retired he did not know whether he was sane or not.

Pete busied himself in preparing shake-downs for the rest of the night, when Bob suggested that they bring up some of the loose sails from the boat.

"Yes, I think it would be as well," agreed Nicoleff. "Pete seems to be rather short of bed-clothes."

He made a sign to the Esquimaux, and the whole four went over the ridge and in a short time returned with the canvas as well as Bert's uniform, which he had exchanged for the suit of skins he wore, and upon which he had noticed Nicoleff had more than once cast a questioning glance.

"Was that the Volga, do you think?" observed Bob, as they entered the hut, continuing a conversation that had been begun while they were down at the shore.

"I am sure of it," answered Nicoleff. "I know my own ship too well to mistake her for anything else, even at midnight, in the Arctic Ocean."

"Yes, Innocent, it was the Volga. I can back Captain Nicoleff up in that," added Bert, bowing respectfully to his superior officer as he spoke, for he had not forgotten the hint of discipline he had received a short time before.

"Well, suppose we get some sleep. We will be on board the Volga before we are many hours older," said the detective, as he threw himself down before the fire.

Captain Nicoleff did not respond. He was wrapped in thought.

Bert Murray, who knew his moods pretty well, seated himself upon a pile of the canvas they had brought in, and while apparently only enjoying the genial warmth of the fire, kept his eyes fixed upon the captain's face.

He knew that there was something passing in the mind of Nicoleff Novritch that would fine vent in words before long.

As for Pete, the Esquimaux, he was to all appear-

ances fast asleep in a corner, having done everything that hospitality demanded for his guests.

For half an hour there was absolute silence in the hut, save for the measured breathing of the sleepers, and the occasional click from the log fire that burned steadily in the center of the apartment.

It was a picturesque sight. The ruddy glow of the embers falling across the thoughtful face of the Russian captain as he frowned meditatively or smiled sternly in unison with the ideas that coursed through his brain; lighting up the handsome, clear-cut boyish features of Bert Murray, whose thoughts were in fact of the fair Marie, and of how he would like to meet any number of foes for her sake; flickering over the compact form of the detective, lying, like a lion asleep, ready to spring into action at the first note of danger. In the background, where the reflection of the fire had only the effect of placing him in deeper shadow, Pete, the Esquimaux, recumbent, and perhaps asleep!

"Bert!" said Nicoleff, at last.

"Sir!"

"We must do it now."

"Yes, sir."

The boy did not ask what he meant. He had been expecting that Captain Nicoleff could come to a decision before he slept.

"The men are in another hut."

"Yes, sir."

"I will go and bring them here."

"Yes, sir."

There was nothing for Bert to do but to acquiesce in Captain Nicoleff's remarks. The boy was not being asked for advice, but only told what was required of him.

The captain had arisen while speaking, and was feeling in his pocket to make sure that his six-shooter was by his side in his belt. His sword had been restored to him by Wilfred Stokes when the latter set him free, and he had besides a dagger in a sheath concealed in his breast.

Bert was fully armed in the same way, his weapons having been, as we know, taken from the chest in the boat in which he and the detective had left the Volga.

When Captain Nicoleff arose and expressed his intention of going for his four seamen, who were quartered in the other hut, the boy got up too, and looked at the detective, as if doubtful whether he should wake him.

Nicoleff held up his hand restrainingly.

"No; let him sleep till the last moment. He will do all the more effective work for even an hour's rest."

"Yes, sir."

As Bert obediently said these words he could not restrain a most prodigious yawn on his own account.

"Ah, yes; my poor boy!" said the captain, placing his hand kindly upon Bert's shoulder. "I had forgotten. You are as tired as any of us."

"No, sir. Not very. I am sorry I yawned. It took me unawares, or I would have stopped it," replied Bert, manfully.

"Never mind. You shall turn into your own bunk before to-morrow night. Mark my words. You may have a little fighting first, but that will make you enjoy your rest all the more when you do get it, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, sit still here—or, better still, lie down for a few minutes—while I go and get the boys."

"Yes, sir."

Poor Bert, whom the warmth of the hut had made very sleepy, took advantage of the permission that had been vouchsafed him by his captain, and dropped by the side of the detective, as Nicoleff disappeared through the doorway into the outer night.

The slight disturbance awoke Burleigh at once.

"Halloa, Bert! What's the matter?"

The detective was used to broken rest, especially since he had been aboard the Americus, and he was broad awake, with all his senses about him, as soon as he opened his eyes.

"Nothing is the matter, Innocent. Go to sleep."

Bob Burleigh sat up and looked around him. He detected the absence of the Russian captain instantly.

"Where is Nicoleff?"

"Gone out."

"Where has he gone?"

"To capture the Volga. What should the skipper be doing when he knows that his craft is in the hands of a pirate right under his nose?"

"Stop your fooling, Bert, and tell me what is going on. I am ashamed of myself for sleeping while you and he were awake. Where is Captain Nicoleff? There is something afoot, I know."

"Well, you bet your mustache there is," answered Bert, whose sleepiness was dispelled as soon as he had any one to talk to.

"What is it?"

"Don't speak so loud. Don't you know there are ladies present?"

"You young monkey! I believe you would joke at the cannon's mouth."

"I am not joking. Listen."

"Well?"

"Captain Nicoleff does not feel like waiting till morning before making an attack upon the Black Bear."

"Ah!"

"In fact, I don't see why he should. Surely it is better to go now in the darkness, when we can steal aboard quietly and comfortably, than to rush out in the open daylight, a target for every gun on the ship. I tell you, they can swing that brass bow-chaser around mighty easily, to say nothing of the

four beauties on the main deck. Why, Innocent, they could blow us all to perdition before we got our boat launched, and we would not be any the wiser."

"We might be sadder, eh?" suggested the detective, with a smile, for the boy's jesting spirit was infectious.

"Indeed, I don't believe there would be any pieces of us big enough to feel sadness or anything else. But, never mind about that. We are not going to be such fools as to give that confounded pirate a chance. We are going now, in the night, and if there is any blowing-up to be done, we will let the Black Bear have it."

"But, do you suppose they will not be watching for a night attack? Bert, my boy, you evidently do not give Clarence Wrench credit for very much sense. He may be a villain—he is—but he is not a fool, and a better seaman never trod a deck."

"All right, Innocent. We must take our chances on that. But I would rather go at night than show myself to the Volga's guns in the daylight."

Both the young men had been talking earnestly, though in low tones, and neither observed a white face framed by a profusion of dark hair, that was peeping between two of the barrels that screened off the sleeping apartment of Pauline and Marie Novritch from the rest of the hut.

The pale face was that of the young girl, Marie, and she had been listening intently to the conversation. Her expression was that of deep anxiety, mingled perhaps with a little admiration for one of the young men, though which one it would have been difficult to tell, for Bob and Bert were so close together that a glance intended for one might easily and naturally have been appropriated by the other.

Fortunately, however, both were unconscious of her scrutiny, so there were no misapprehensions to cause trouble all around.

Suddenly the door opened, and Nicoleff, with the four seamen who had accompanied him when he first boarded the *Americus*, entered the hut.

Marie's face at once disappeared from between the barrels as Bert and the detective stood up ready for whatever was to follow.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLACK BEAR'S NEMESIS.

"You understand what we have to do?" commenced Captain Nicoleff, in Russian, to his crew. The four men nodded intelligence.

"We will row directly up to the Volga, silently, with oars muffled, and try to get aboard before we are noticed at all. It will require care, skill and courage, but I think I can depend upon all three from you, eh?" he continued.

Again the four seamen nodded.

"That is enough then. Pauline!"

He called his sister-in-law quietly, but she appeared at once from her corner, showing that she had not been asleep during the foregoing remarks.

"Yes, Nicoleff."

"You and Marie stay here with Pete until we return. We shall have but little trouble with this insolent pirate, Clarence Wrench, for we have our own men aboard the Volga, and it will only be necessary for me to show myself to them to bring them to my support."

"Very well, Nicoleff. And, if you meet him face to face, sword in hand, strike hard—for—Ivan's sake."

The brows of the speaker contracted, and the hate she felt for her husband's murderer was depicted on her countenance in a darkly shadowed desire for vengeance.

"I'll remember, Pauline," answered Nicoleff, gently, as he pressed her hand. "When day breaks you can go outside the hut and look over the top of the hill here. Then you will be able to see for yourself how the battle goes."

"Ready, captain?" asked Bob, as he and the rest gathered at the door.

"Yes. Good-by, Pauline. Keep up heart for a few hours and all will be well. Say good-by to Marie for me."

"Marie is here, and you can say it to her yourself," broke in the voice of the young girl as she stepped forth.

"Isn't she a daisy?" muttered Bert Murray to himself. "I wish I could do something specially for her. Then I could die happy."

Mr. Murray was not given to sentimental rhapsodies, but he meant what he said in this instance.

"Come," interposed Nicoleff, "or it will be daylight before we start."

Without another word he opened the door and went out, followed by his four seamen, Bob Burleigh and Bert.

A brisk walk of but a few minutes brought them to a spot where they had a good view of the Volga, in the shape of a black mass against the starlit horizon.

"There she is—a beauty," observed Bert, as he gazed at the steamer and tried to make out her exact shape in the gloom. "And to think of that scallawag of a Wrench taking it easy in the skipper's cabin, as I suppose he is. Oh, I feel like kicking myself!"

"Silence!" commanded Nicoleff. He often found it necessary to curb the exuberance of his young officer.

The party walked cautiously forward until they reached the boat, which was pulled high up on the shore, just as it had been left an hour or so before.

The exertions of seven people soon had it afloat, and then, without a word, the four seamen each manned an oar. Bob Burleigh took his place in the

bow, while Captain Nicoleff in the stern, took the helm, and Bert sat at his side, ready to obey any orders issued by his skipper.

"Bear away," commanded the captain, gently, and the four oars dipped in the water and sent the heavy boat skimming across the waves toward the cruiser.

"Cautiously, men," admonished Nicoleff, as the muzzles of the guns, frowning through their open ports, became plainly discernible. "We don't know who is behind those barkers of ours."

He spoke in Russian, but the detective and Murray were both familiar with that language, so that they understood exactly what he said.

"Haden't we better row around to the other side, under her stern?" asked the detective. "We shall be the more likely to catch them unawares."

"If they have not yet seen us," remarked Bert.

"I do not think they have. In any case, we shall be no worse off than we are now, and may be better."

To stop further discussion, Nicoleff gave orders to his crew, and turning the rudder himself, the boat ran straight for the stern of the Volga.

All seemed quiet on board the cruiser, though Nicoleff thought he could see some one on the bridge, leaning carelessly against the railing. Of this, however, he could not be sure.

They rowed slowly and softly immediately under the stern, and then made their way around the vessel to the bow.

"Bert!"

"Sir!"

"Could you climb up to the anchor-chains here and look into that window above?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do so, and tell me what you see."

The boy needed no second bidding. Like a monkey he sprang for the rusty chains that held the two anchors, until he could stand upon them level with the hawse-holes. Then he raised himself a little more and peeped through the port that the captain had pointed out. It was, as he knew, the means of light for a small cubby-hole in which his boatswain kept his private stores, and which was seldom tenanted.

"Empty, sir," reported Bert. "An oil lamp that gives a little light so that I can see all around."

"Climb up on deck and reconnoiter," was Nicoleff's next order.

Nothing loth, the boy sprang from one rope to another until he reached the bowsprit, where, seizing the forestays to steady himself, he looked along the deck.

No one was to be seen, and cautiously crawling down to the deck, he stole along till he could stand in the shadow of the foremast. He heard voices in Russian from the fore-castle, but was too far away to distinguish what they said.

"While I am here, I will see what is going on in the captain's state-room," he muttered, as he skimmed along under the lee of the bulwarks toward the after-part of the vessel.

The skylight of the cabin was uncovered, and he leaned over the brass guards and looked down. As he did so, he started back with an exclamation of horror.

His eyes had met those of Captain Clarence Wrench, who was lying upon his back on the table staring straight up at the skylight.

In that one glance the boy saw that the Black Bear was a maniac.

"That will do. I'll go back and report."

He turned away and ran plump into the arms of the second officer of the Volga.

Both instinctively drew their cutlasses, and then the officer, recognizing the boy, dropped the point of his weapon, and said heartily, in Russian:

"Why, Bert; where did you come from?"

"From shore. I have brought the skipper aboard."

"You have? Where is he?"

"He's in a boat under the bows of the Volga, like a skulking Indian, trying to attract the attention of the officers. Nice thing, isn't it?"

The boy spoke bitterly, but the second officer did not notice the tone. He hurried forward, and in less time than it takes to tell it, Captain Nicoleff was once more upon the deck of his own ship, having regained it, somewhat to his surprise, without strife or bloodshed.

Explanations were being rapidly exchanged, when suddenly a pistol-shot sounded from the neighborhood of the cabin, and a bullet imbedded itself in the solid thickness of the mainmast.

"Look out," yelled Bert, as he hastily dragged Captain Nicoleff aside.

None too soon!

A tall figure in black bearskin, with eyes flashing even in the semi-darkness, was rushing toward the group, and even as the boy spoke, discharged another shot from his smoking pistol that would have ended the life of the Russian captain, had he not been pulled out of range just in time.

The Black Bear was running amuck!

There was no mistake about the insanity of the captain of the *Americus*! He was as mad as human being could be, but—there was one set idea in his madness. He was determined to have the life of Captain Nicoleff.

To the distempered imagination of the fiend, the face of Nicoleff Novritch brought to him with awful distinctness the features of the Ivan Novritch whom he had inveigled to St. Petersburg years ago, that he might seize his property in Boston by means of papers that he had got from him under the guise of friendship. Wild visions of vengeance to be taken upon him for trusts betrayed to Ivan and his wife, Pauline, chased each other through his brain, and now he desired only to kill this man—this

brother of the injured dead—who threatened vengeance upon his head.

With a shout that, while in the voice of Clarence Wrench, was yet something like the cry of a wild beast, he rushed upon Captain Nicoleff, firing as he came.

The bullet went through the hat of the Russian, tearing off a line of skin just above his left ear as it did so, but otherwise not injuring him.

He was about to fire again, but Bert, quick as lightning, struck the pistol with his cutlass and knocked it from the madman's hand.

"*Sacre!*" growled the Black Bear, as he took his cutlass in his right hand and threw himself upon the Russian captain.

There was no time for any one to interpose.

In a second the two captains were in the heat of combat. Both were masters of their weapons, and the Black Bear, although the blow he had received the day before had dethroned his reason, was as able and wary in the fence as ever.

"Confound that savage! Can't we stop him? It isn't right to let Captain Nicoleff risk his life with such a fellow as that low-down pirate! Innocent, grab him from behind when I hit his sword!"

The detective needed no second bidding. Though the chances were that Nicoleff would overcome his adversary, the latter was making such a desperate fight, that no one could be sure of the result of the combat.

The two young men dodged around and tried to carry out their intentions, while the second officer, with a look of distress upon his face, seemed at a loss what to do. As to the Russian seamen, they were too well disciplined to interfere until they were ordered to do so.

"*Sacre!*" yelled the Black Bear, as the cutlass of Nicoleff slashed his sword-arm slightly.

So far the detective and Bert had been utterly unable to carry out their intentions for the succor of Captain Nicoleff.

The Black Bear made a desperate cut at his opponent, but Nicoleff, who had seen that the other was beginning to fight wildly, was watching him warily. With one turn of the wrist, the Russian captain managed to catch the weapon of the other in such a way that it was torn from the Black Bear's grasp and sent spinning across the deck.

"Now finish him," yelled Bert, in the excitement of the moment.

Captain Nicoleff hesitated. He did not care about killing even a scoundrel in cold blood.

The Black Bear glanced around him for a second. Then aiming a blow with his fist at Bert Murray, which, fortunately for the boy, caught him on the shoulder instead of in the face, as was intended, but which knocked him head over heels, as it was, the Black Bear, with another fiendish "*Sacre!*" broke through the group, and clearing the bulwarks at a bound, sprang into the sea.

CHAPTER XV.

BERT'S BREACH OF DISCIPLINE.

For some time after the party left the hut, Pauline and Marie sat in front of the fire, each wrapped in their own reflections, while the dwarfish Indian, Pete, busied himself in examining his fishing apparatus, spears, etc. He felt that it would be a breach of etiquette to lie down again while his guests were sitting up.

"I hope Nicoleff will be safe," said Marie.

"I hope that villain Wrench will be killed," responded her mother, sternly. She had nothing but bitterness in her heart when she thought of the Black Bear.

For an hour or more they sat thus, exchanging a few words at intervals, but generally silent.

Pete, at his spears, hooks and nets, took but little notice of them, save to hold himself in readiness to obey any wish they might express, so far as it lay in his power.

Suddenly he looked up, as if he scented danger. By what peculiar means the impression that something was wrong was conveyed to his mind cannot be explained. As we know, he was deaf and dumb, and certainly could not hear anything.

Yet he put down the iron spear that he had been intently examining, and walking forward until he was in the circle of firelight, made signs to Pauline that there was some one outside.

"What does he mean, mother?" asked Marie, looking from the grotesque figure of the Esquimaux to the door of the hut, in response to his gesticulations.

"I will soon see," responded Pauline.

She arose and moved toward the door, but Pete placed himself in her way, shaking his head and intimating that he would open the door.

Pauline, with a shrug, stepped back, as the Esquimaux, arming himself with his iron spear, threw open the door and looked out.

Then, as he raised his spear threateningly, it was twisted from his grasp, and the Black Bear, his dark eyes blazing with the fire of insanity, and with his bearskin clothing soaked with water, stalked into the hut.

With his left hand he held the Esquimaux by the throat, dragging him in as if he had been a puppy.

He walked straight up to Pauline and looked her steadily in the eye.

"Do you know me?" he demanded.

The intense hate of the woman was unrestrained as she answered:

"Yes, Clarence Wrench, I do know you. The murderer of my husband, and the robber of my child! Yes, I know you, and I will be revenged!"

Quick as thought she drew a poniard from her bosom and struck at him.

He seized her wrist ere the blow could descend,

and, with a scornful laugh, threw her to one side, as he dashed the Esquimaux to the ground on the other.

"*Sacre!*" he hissed.

Then, before his intention could be divined, he stooped and grasped Marie around the waist.

"Mother!" she shrieked, but her cry was drowned by the wild "Ha, ha!" of the madman, who rushed out of the open doorway with the girl in his arms, and running up the hill as if he hardly felt his burden, ran at full speed toward the sea.

"Pete! Pete!" screamed Pauline, as she regained her feet and started in pursuit.

The Indian, although he could not hear her call, understood what was required of him. He had been partly stunned by the force with which he had been dashed to the ground, but soon recovered himself. He only waited to take another iron spear, similar to that carried off by the Black Bear, and then joined Pauline in her chase of the abductor.

Down to the shore ran Wrench, with the half-fainting girl in his arms.

"*Sacre!* Make no noise or I'll brain you!" he hissed, as he ran along the shore, evidently searching for something.

With a demoniacal laugh of triumph he suddenly swooped down upon a small boat covered with skins and propelled by a paddle, such as is in general use among the Esquimaux, and which is known as a kyack.

It was fastened by a skin rope to an old stanchion driven into the ground.

With one slash of his knife the Black Bear severed the rope, and, placing Marie in the boat, seized the paddle, and launching the light craft with one vigorous push, leaped into it and paddled out to sea.

"My Marie!" cried an agonized voice from the shore, as Pauline with Peter close behind, rushed down to the water's edge just as the kyack danced away over the waves.

"Mother!" answered the girl.

A loud "Ha, ha!" from the Black Bear floated over the water like the triumphant laugh of an evil spirit and the Black Bear threw all his mighty strength, augmented now by that born of insanity, into the paddle, and was soon out of sight.

Marie sat cowering in the bottom of the small craft, too frightened to speak, and moreover conscious that words would be thrown away upon the terrible being who now had her so thoroughly in his power.

She saw that they passed a large vessel that, even in her terror, she recognized as the Volga.

She looked up at its immense bulk as the kyack shot past some three or four hundred yards away.

A cry trembled on her lips, but the Black Bear, with a madman's cunning, divined her purpose, and placed one of his hands heavily over her mouth, while his devilish black eyes seemed to fairly scorch her, and dry up the words she would have spoken.

They passed the Volga, Marie trying in vain to make out who was on her deck, and then another huge vessel came in sight.

Straight for it paddled the Black Bear, until, as the kyack struck the hull, he seized a rope ladder hanging from the main chains, and taking Marie in his right arm, climbed rapidly up to the deck of the Americus.

Scarcely had his foot touched the deck, when a dozen hands seized him, while some one tore the girl away from him, and bore her out of his sight.

"*Sacre!*" he hissed, as he broke away from his captors, and, flourishing the iron spear of the Indian which he had retained ever since he took it from its owner, kept every one at bay.

"Seize him, men! He is crazy, and he will do harm to some one yet!"

The voice was that of Captain Nicoleff. It seemed to redouble the fury of the Black Bear.

He glared around him, and, raising the iron spear, tried to throw it at Nicoleff after the manner of a javelin.

He would have succeeded in his purpose had not Bob Burleigh, who had ventured closer to the lunatic than any one else, grasped the spear at the critical moment, and tried to drag it away.

We say tried, because he was not successful. Clarence Wrench's Herculean strength easily prevailed against the by no means to be despised muscle of the young detective.

When the maniac turned and saw who had interfered with his murderous purpose he became even more frantic than before. Relinquishing his intention toward Nicoleff, he vented all his hate upon the detective. With one pull he had the iron spear in his hand. Then he swung it up over his head, and it seemed that Bob Burleigh's time had come.

"*Sacre!*" hissed the demon.

Down came the spear, and Bob jumped back. Unfortunately for him his back was toward the bulwark, and he could not retreat.

But, suddenly—bang! went a pistol-shot, followed quickly by another and another.

The iron spear dropped from the hand of the coast pirate, and he turned completely around. For a second he gasped and threw up his hands. Then, turning his glazing eyes defiantly upon Nicoleff, he sunk to the deck.

"I didn't know whether I could do it from where I was, but I thought I had better try," remarked Bert Murray, cheerfully, as he stepped forward and bent over the body of the Black Bear.

"Right through the breast," announced the detective, referring to the course of the bullets.

"Mr. Murray, consider yourself under arrest, for acting without orders!" put in Captain Nicoleff, sternly.

Poor Bert looked very much crestfallen.

"Oh, Uncle Nicoleff, you won't do that, will you? He saved your life. Do not, for my sake!"

It was Marie who spoke, and Bert Murray felt that he did not care what Captain Nicoleff might say or do now.

The captain hesitated a moment, but another look into the pretty, pleading face of his niece, was too much for him.

"Very well, my dear! I will forgive him for your sake. But he had better not do such a thing again while he is under my command."

Bert saluted, and muttered to himself:

"Of course I won't, because there was only one Black Bear, and I killed him. But *ain't* she a daisy! Said it was for her sake. Yes, everything is for her sake!"

The conversation had been carried on in English, but the Russian sailors comprehended its purport, even although they could not understand the exact words.

Now that the Black Bear's career was ended, there was but little trouble in the way of either Bob Burleigh or Captain Nicoleff in carrying out their purpose to stop the evil uses to which the Americus had been put by its unprincipled commander, without the knowledge of its crew.

The counterfeiting apparatus was brought to light as well as the secret treasure that had been accidentally discovered by Wilfred Stokes.

Bob Burleigh took charge of these things until the Americus was brought back to San Francisco, where they were turned over to the United States authorities. Then he gave his attention to restoring to Pauline and her daughter the estate of Ivan Novritch in Boston, which had been withheld by the Black Bear, who supposed that Pauline and her daughter had perished in Siberia with the man he had betrayed into the hands of the authorities at St. Petersburg on a false charge of treason.

The detective was entirely successful, and has won the life-long regard of Pauline Novritch and her daughter.

Captain Nicoleff Novritch took from the Americus her contraband liquors, and consigning Pauline and Marie to the care of Bob Burleigh, continued on his cruise for the benefit of his Government, promising to be in Boston to visit his sister-in-law and niece within two years, on which occasion it was understood Bert Murray was to accompany him. Perhaps Marie and Bert may both be looking forward to meeting again! Who can tell?

When at length the Americus, after finishing her business at San Francisco, ran into her home port in command of Wilfred Stokes, her owners made the latter captain and Silas Hawkins first mate. The stanch ship has again started on a cruise in the Arctic, where they hope to have a more profitable and less exciting voyage than the last one turned out to be.

Pietro the dwarf managed to get away with his \$50,000 worth of diamonds. Whether he carried out his plan of going to Madrid or not, no one knows. Certain it is, however, that his ill-gotten wealth brought him no happiness. Perhaps we may in future learn something of his ultimate fate.

Sailors are fond of spinning yarns, as every one knows. There is not a fore-castle story in the whole whaling fleet of the Arctic that has been more often told than that of the Black Bear's Last Cruise.

THE END.

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